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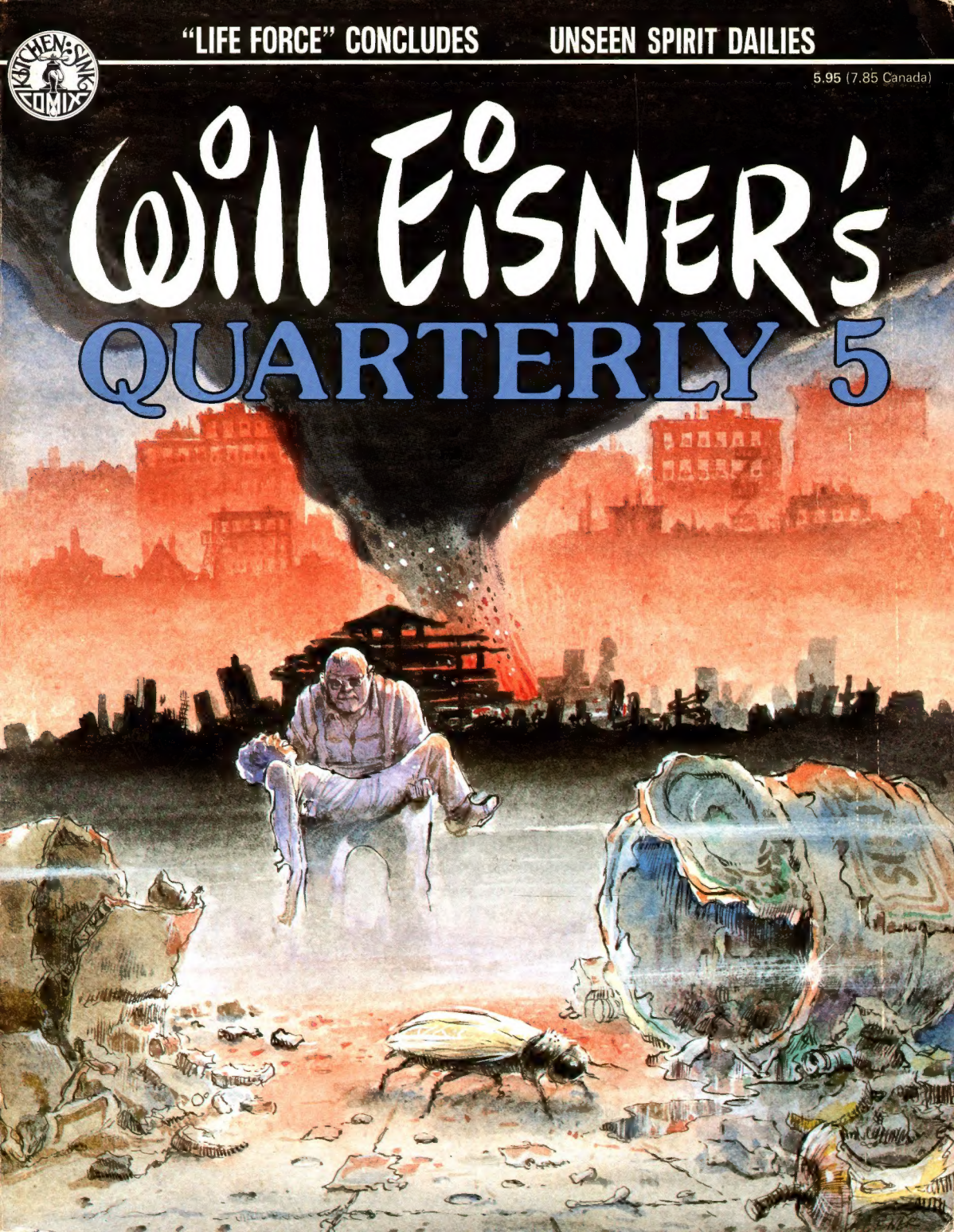

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SPIRIT section courtesy of Bill Blackbeard/San Francisco Academy of Comic Art.

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36. .SPIRIT DAILIES. The first 19 SPIRIT comic strips are highlighted, including 10 never before seen in reprint.

57. .COLOR SECTION. The Spirit cooks up a phony kidnapping plot. The victim: Ellen Dolan! (August 11, 1940).

No. 5 APRIL 1985

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A Life Force

The Conclusion

This issue of *Will Eisner's Quarterly* contains the last chapter in the graphic novel, *A Life Force.* The story centers on the lives of the residents of a Bronx tenement at 55 Dropsie Avenue in the 1930s.

In the last issue, Frieda Gold, Jacob Shtarkah's lover of 30 years before, has arrived from Germany, escaping the growing Nazi oppression. Jacob takes her to an apartment near his residence and hires her as the bookkeeper at the lumber yard he owns with Angelo, his Italian neighbor.

Frieda's arrival awakens in Jacob "a dream locked up that wants to come out. . . maybe it's wanting to stay alive for something *more* than supper." Frieda, however, is wary of any involvement with Jacob, reminding him of his wife, Rifka, and family.

At home, Jacob and Rifka eat supper while Rifka complains that she feels everyone "keeps things from me." Angelo interrupts, and he and Jacob take a walk to their property. There they meet Pete, the Black Hand chief, who arranges to sell them lumber at a cut-rate price and with a long time to pay.

Soon, the business is doing very well, indeed. So well that Elton Shaftsbury's stock broker employers decide to sell the company's stock at $5 a share on the public market. Since Angelo and Jacob have 75,000 shares, they suddenly are rich.

When Shaftsbury delivers this good news to Jacob, he also tells of his and Rebecca's plan to get married. Jacob is shocked, telling Shaftsbury that with growing anti-Semitism in the world, both Shaftsbury and Jacob's daughter might be headed for heartbreak. Shaftsbury refuses to take this objection seriously, and Jacob leaves in a depressed mood.

He confides to Frieda his true objection to the proposed marriage: "Elton is a. . . a goy [and] I can't accept such a marriage! It puts an end to something. . .a tradition maybe. . .but for *me*, it has to do with *surviving.*"

Frieda, who has expressed concern about Jacob's cynicism and bitterness, advises him not to stand in the way of love. There is nothing Jacob and Rifka can do but accept the situation.

A neighborhood child, Yussie, daydreams about being a gunfighter in the Old West. Making believe one day, he wanders into the lumber yard, where he falls "shot" by rustlers. But Yussie finds a very real body lying hidden among some boxes. He runs away, to the doorstep of his home at 55 Dropsie Avenue.

Rebecca and Elton find Yussie hiding out, and Elton takes him to the lumber yard. They don't find a body, but they find the clothes of a man in a garbage can, along with a box from Pete's distribution company.

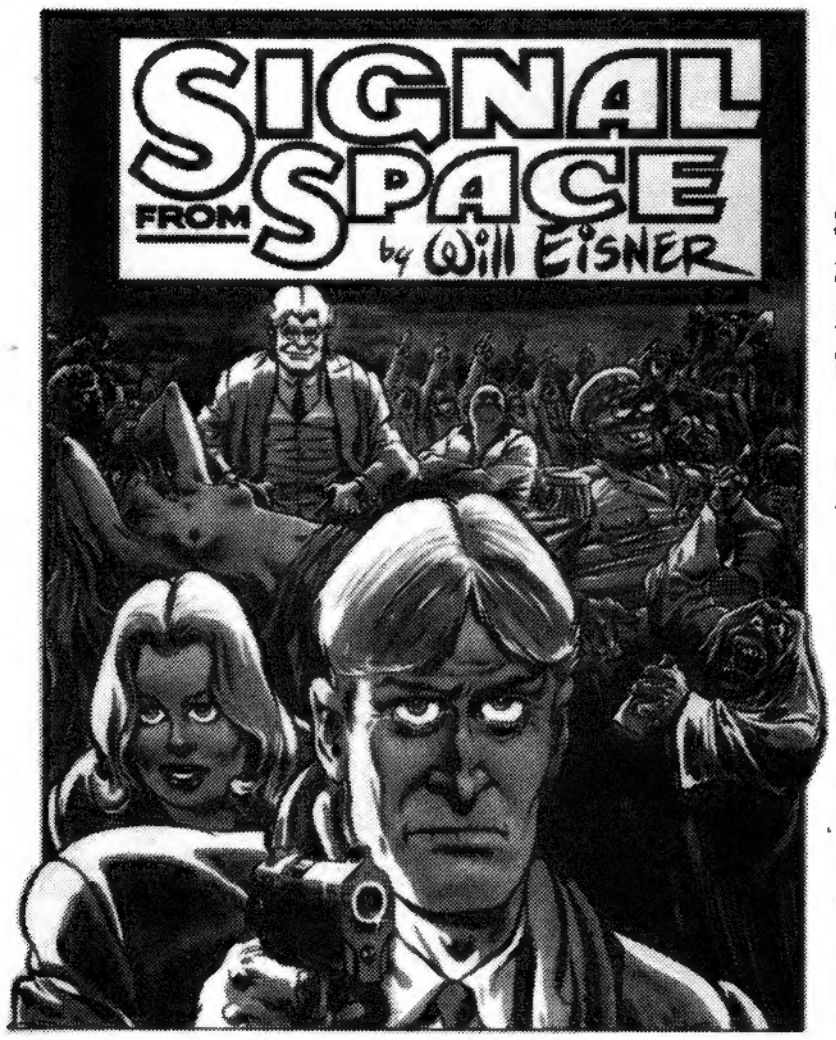
Pete and his gunsel, Gino, talk about the cadaver. Gino tells Pete that the man was dumped in the yard by accident, and that the man was either a member of a rival gang or a "fed." He tells Pete that he dumped the body in the river.

Elton inquires about Pete to Jacob, who says that no questions are asked about Pete's supply, and that the business pays for the goods in cash. Elton discreetly shadows Pete's men and finds that they are hijackers using the yard as a drop for stolen goods.

Elton makes some other discoveries. First, his brokerage firm has sold all the stock they hold in the lumber yard and have made Elton a partner. They do not care about racketeers. Second, Rebecca tells Elton that she is pregnant. They decide to get married immediately.

As this concluding episode opens, the narrative net begins to tighten around the characters. . .

EISNER HARDCOVER BOOKS AT REMAINDER PRICES!



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CHAPTER 11
SURVIVAL

MANY MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO... BEFORE THE FAMILIAR FORM OF WHAT WE KNOW AS HUMAN BEINGS APPEARED... THE **COCKROACH**, IN GREAT NUMBERS, INHABITED THE NOOKS AND CRANNIES OF THE EARTH...

IN THE ENSUING CENTURIES THESE INSECTS MANAGED TO SURVIVE LONG AFTER OTHER SIMILAR SPECIES DISAPPEARED!

MEANWHILE, IN A SHORT SPAN OF TIME... THE **HUMAN** SPECIES EVOLVED, AFFECTING THEIR ENVIRONMENT IN A MOST REMARKABLE WAY!!

WONDROUSLY, THESE UPRIGHT CREATURES ACTUALLY CAME TO DEAL WITH AND CONTROL NATURAL PHENOMENA ...THEY WERE ABLE TO DOMINATE OR SUBDUE OTHER FORMS OF LIFE MORE POWERFUL THAN THEY... AND DESPITE FAMINE, DISEASE AND OTHER DISASTERS SUCH AS SELF-DESTRUCTION... THEY HAVE MANAGED TO SURVIVE AND EVEN INCREASE THEIR NUMBERS MANY TIMES OVER!

THEY HAVE, IN COMMON WITH THE COCKROACH, A REMARKABLE LIFE FORCE!

WILLIE! TAKE UNCLE MAX WITH YOU ON DELIVERIES!

AW, POP... HE'S A NUISANCE ...LIKE A BABY!

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT FROM A MAN WHO WAS KNOCKED ON THE HEAD BY SOME UNION GOON!?

WE OWE HIM AT LEAST A LITTLE RESPECT... WHAT ARE WE, ANIMALS IN A JUNGLE? HAVE A LITTLE PITY!

OKAY... C'MON UNCLE MAX !!

NOW, UNCLE MAX... DON'T WANDER OFF! WE'LL STOP FOR A 2 CENTS PLAIN ON THE WAYBACK!

.. ON ME MOTHER'S GRAVE... I'M TELLIN' YOU THE TRUTH, GINO!

...YOU SURE? HOW DO YOU KNOW THE STIFF WE DUMPED IN LOMBARDI'S YARD WAS A FED?

IRISH EDDIE TIPPED HIM OFF ABOUT **YOU** AN' **PETE'S** HI-JACK RACKET! BESIDES, I SEEN HIS BADGE... IT WAS IN HIS POCKET WHEN WE STRIPPED HIM!

TRYIN' TO BE A UNION BUSTER EH?

HOLY SHIT!!

WHERE YOU GOIN, GINO?

TO LOMBARDI'S LUMBER YARD ..TO GET THEM CLOTHES BEFORE ANY-BODY FINDS THE BADGE!

EEE GOD IN HEAVEN EEE

I DON'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME

IN MY CONDITION I'LL DROP!

MOMMA, WHAT'S THE MATTER?

REBECCA, IS THAT YOU?

MOMMA, STOP SCREAMING! WHAT'S THE MATTER?

EEE OH, I CAN'T STAND IT

HERE, HAVE A GLASS OF WATER!

YOUR FATHER WANTS A DIVORCE!

POPPA... IS THAT TRUE ??

GO AHEAD, TELL HER, JACOB! ...AFTER 30 YEARS MARRIED....

ALL OF A SUDDEN, HE WANTS A DIVORCE

...NOT SO ALL-OF-A-SUDDEN! ...TO TELL THE TRUTH I THOUGHT OF IT MORE THAN ONCE!

BUT POPPA, DIDN'T YOU EVER LOVE HER?

LOVE? HER FAMILY HIRED A'SHOTKIN' WHO ARRANGED THE WHOLE THING... SHE GOT A MAN WITH A 'TRADE'... AND I GOT A GOOD WOMAN WHOSE FATHER LEFT HER A FEW DOLLARS!

SO WHAT'S SO TERRIBLE ABOUT THAT?... I ASK YOU!

NOT TERRIBLE ...JUST, NOT ENOUGH!

YOU WANTED, MAYBE A SEXY MOVIE STAR? SO, ARE YOU, EPPIS, A VALENTINO??

SEX?? WELL, YOU DID YOUR DUTY...WHEN I WANTED... YOU GAVE P-E-R-I-O-D!

BUT POPPA SHE DEVOTED HER WHOLE LIFE TO TAKING CARE OF YOU!

YES... AND THAT WAS TO ME THE BARS OF MY PRISON!

112

I WASH HIS CLOTHES... I MAKE FOR HIM A GOOD CLEAN HOME...I GIVE HIM CHILDREN... THAT IS BY HIM A PRISON?

PLEASE, MOMMA... THE WHOLE NEIGHBORHOOD CAN HEAR YOU!

GOD IN HEAVEN! HE'S **SIXTY** YEARS OLD... AND HE WANTS A... A DIVORCE!?

PLEASE, RIFKA, PLEASE TRY TO UNDERSTAND... IT'S **NOT YOUR FAULT**... WE ONLY STAYED TOGETHER BECAUSE THERE WAS NOTHING ELSE! BUT NOW THE CHILDREN ARE GROWN, SO, EVEN **THAT** REASON IS GONE...SO, WHAT ELSE IS THERE TO **STAY** FOR...??

SO, WHAT DO YOU WANT ?

WHAT DO I WANT ? WHAT DO I WANT ? I WANT BACK MY DREAM ... THAT'S WHAT I WANT !!

FOR 30 YEARS I ATE, SLEPT, AND NAILED WOOD... ALL THE TIME, LOCKED UP INSIDE OF ME WAS THE DREAM OF WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN !!

AH... A PHILOSOPHER... IN ALL THOSE YEARS YOU COULD HARDLY MAKE EVEN A GOOD LIVING... SO, NOW WHEN YOU GOT A FEW DOLLARS... YOU ALREADY ARE A BIG DREAMER... WHAT CAN A MAN OF YOUR AGE WANT ?

I DON'T WANT TO BE A COCKROACH !

GO ! GO ! MISTER COCK ROACH... I WON'T NEED FROM YOU... TOMORROW, I COULD BE DEAD

WHAT'S GOING ON?

MOMMA, PLEASE TAKE AN ASPIRIN

THE SHTARKAS ARE GETTING A DIVORCE !

YOU HEARD THAT GUSSIE ? ... A DIVORCE

LOMBARDI LUMBER

HEY, WE'RE CLOSED UP! :?:

HOW YOU DOIN' ANGELO ...IT'S ME, GINO!

WHAT D'YA WANT ?

'COUPLA DAYS AGO I LEFT SOME CLOTHES IN YER YARD. WHERE ARE THEY?

CLOTHES, ...WHAT CLOTHES? I DUNNO ABOUT NO CL...

DON'T CRAP AROUND WITH ME... I GOT NO TIME!

I TOL' YOU... I DON'T KNOW NUTHIN' ABOUT :'-

YOU GUYS CLEAN UP THE YARD SOME-TIME! YOU HAADA COME ACROSST 'EM!

MOUSTACHE PETE WANTS THEM CLOTHES!!

I'M GONNA TEAR DIS PLACE APART 'TILL I FIND 'EM!

THEY GOTTA BE HERE... SOME-WHERE!

THEM CLOTHES GOTTA BE HERE!

I GONNA FIND THEM IF I HAFTA...

HEY, WHO ARE YOU?

L-E-G-G-O Y'CRAZY SONOB!

LEGGO, Y'NUT, OR I'LL PLUG YOU!

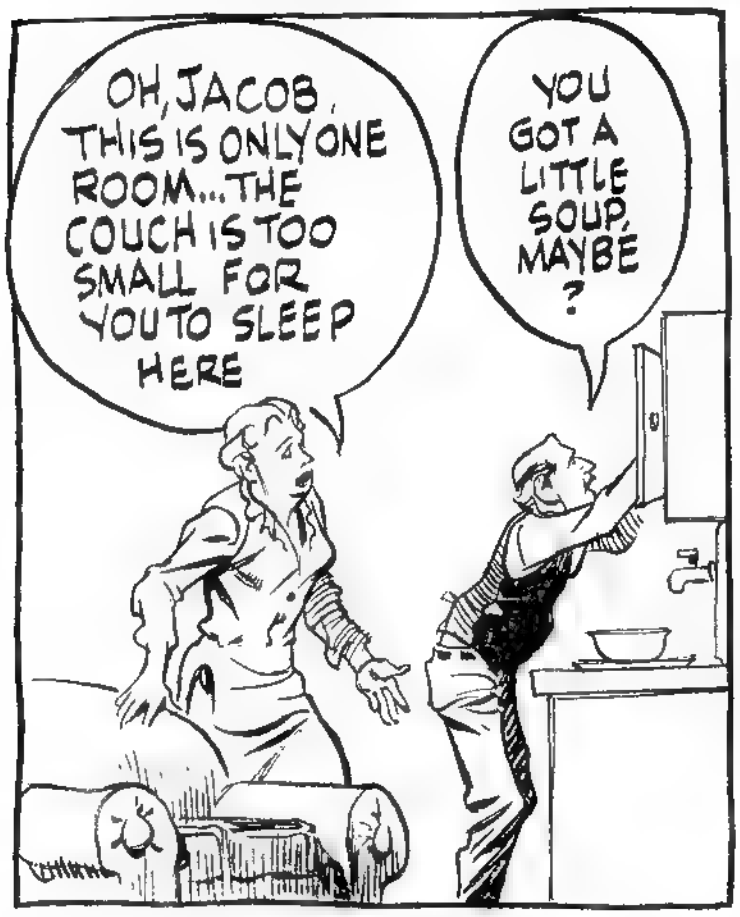
!?

YEOW @★!-GLAK LEGG!

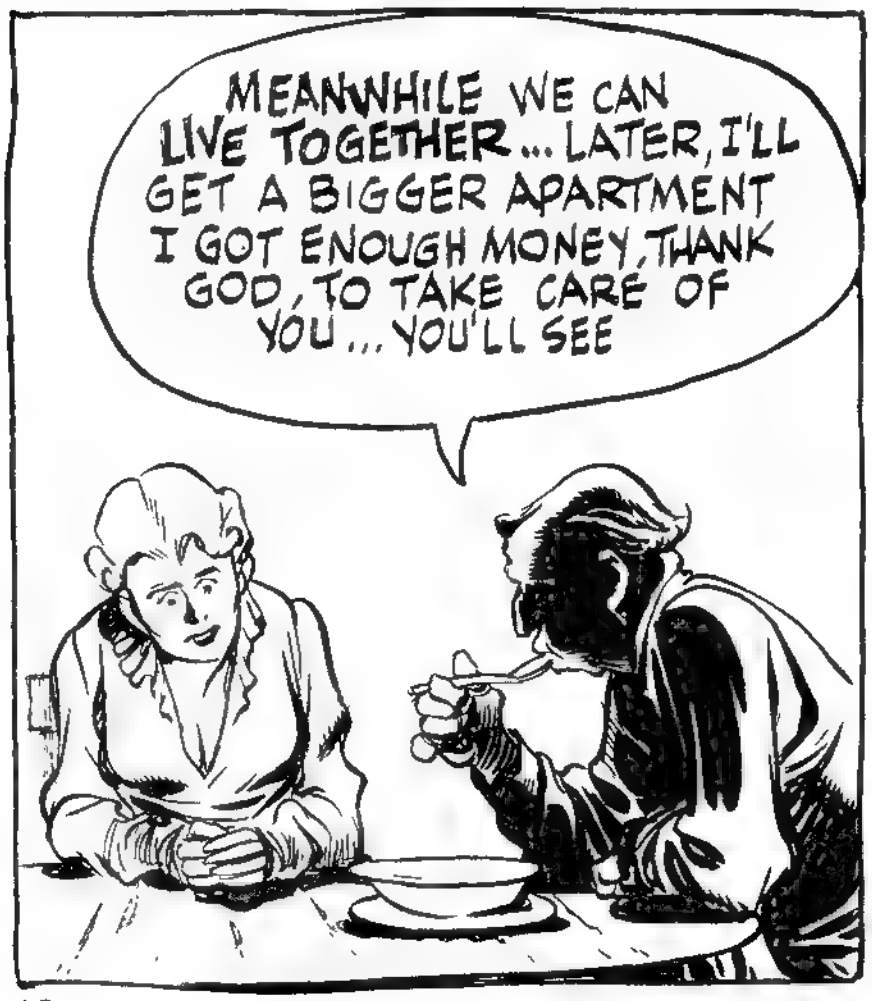
BANG! BANG!

PUFF PUFF

SO, NOW FRIEDA, WE'RE TOGETHER AT LAST.


OH, JACOB, THIS IS ONLY ONE ROOM... THE COUCH IS TOO SMALL FOR YOU TO SLEEP HERE
YOU GOT A LITTLE SOUP, MAYBE ?

..YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, FRIEDA... I AM GOING TO DIVORCE RIFKA... WE ARE GOING TO GET MARRIED!
MEANWHILE ??


MEANWHILE WE CAN LIVE TOGETHER... LATER, I'LL GET A BIGGER APARTMENT I GOT ENOUGH MONEY, THANK GOD, TO TAKE CARE OF YOU... YOU'LL SEE

BUT... RIFKA? ??
RIFKA??? I'LL SEE TO IT THAT SHE WILL HAVE WHAT TO LIVE ON... FRIEDA... YOUR HAND IS SHAKING.. WHY??

I'M FRIGHTENED. I DON'T KNOW WHY! SIGH: EVERYTIME YOU EXPLAIN, IT SEEMS ALRIGHT... YET, IT'S NOT!

MAKE SENSE, FRIEDA!

IT'S ALL HAPPENING IN SUCH A SHORT TIME ... MY WORLD IN GERMANY IS DESTROYED... MY HUSBAND KILLED - MY DAUGHTER RUNNING FROM THE NAZIS - WHO KNOWS WHERE SHE IS? YOU BRING ME TO AMERICA... NOW **YOU WANT TO MARRY ME**.....

AND NOW WHAT NEXT ??

SO, WHAT ELSE IS THERE ?!

WE'LL ENJOY EACH OTHER... LIVING FROM DAY-TO-DAY

BUT IS THAT ENOUGH ?

BEING GIVEN A SECOND CHANCE IS NO SMALL THING!

...I DON'T KNOW... IS THERE A PURPOSE... A REASON? WHAT DOES GOD WANT FROM ME?

WHO KNOWS ?!

SINCE THE BEGINNING, PRIESTS, RABBIS, GURUS OR GONNIFS... EVERYONE MAKES A BUSINESS OUT OF TRYING TO FIGURE IT OUT! ... THEY WRITE BOOKS AND BIBLES... MAKE UP PRAYERS HOPING, MAYBE, TO GET ONE SMALL ANSWER FROM WHICH THEY CAN GET A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING... AND IN THE MEANTIME - MAN AND COCKROACH JUST LIVE FROM DAY-TO-DAY!. WHEN I FIND THE ANSWER, I'LL LET YOU KNOW.

THEN WHAT SHALL WE DO ?

MEANWHILE, WE EAT, SLEEP, AVOID PAIN, ENJOY MAYBE, A LITTLE BEAUTY... AND MAKE LOVE !

119

MAKE LOVE? ??

JACOB, JACOB... I'M 55 YEARS OLD... YOU'RE SIXTY... WE'RE NOT... I MEAN I CAN'T CATCH FIRE LIKE WHEN I WAS A YOUNG GIRL !

TRY, TRY TO REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME WE... ... IN THE WOODS BACK THEN IN NUREMBERG

YES, AT THE PICNIC.. OH, I WAS SO EXCITED! IT WAS SO BEAUTIFUL THEN!

NOO? ...AND NOW ?

AND NOW, I THINK TOO MUCH. **NOW** I HAVE MORE MEMORIES THAN DREAMS... **NOW** I CAN ONLY THINK HOW IT **WAS** WITH MY HUSBAND...

THEN IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY... NO PAST, ONLY THE FUTURE

NOW, IT'S NOT THE SAME... I FEEL LIKE SOME ANIMAL ...WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO DO HERE ISN'T CONNECTED TO HOW I FEEL FOR YOU ... AND YET I **DO FEEL** SOMETHING FOR YOU JACOB ...

HECH!! SO, THAT'S THE END OF **MY** FEELING.. ..FEH!

...SHHH.. ITS ENOUGH FOR ME IF YOU JUST **HOLD** ME, JACOB.

KNOK KNOK

?!

MISSIS GOLD? ARE YOU THE BOOKKEEPER AT **LOMBARDI** LUMBER YARD... THERE'S BEEN A **FIRE** THERE... WE FOUND A COUPLA **BODIES** THERE... WE NEED SOME INFORMATION! JUST ROUTINE ...

JACOB... YOU BEEN STANDING THERE ALL DAY! CAAMAAN...NOTHIN' MORE WE CAN DO...OUR YARD IS ALL RUINED!

ALRIGHT, ANGELO..'SIGH' SO, LET'S GO HOME!!

COME UP TO THE HOUSE NOW!

OH HELLO, WILLIE...WHY ARE YOU SO DRESSED UP? SOMEBODY DIED?

I'M GOIN' TO UNCLE MAX'S FUNERAL

I'M SORRY ABOUT THE FIRE IN YOUR YARD...Y'SEE, UNCLE MAX DIDN'T MEAN TO BURN IT DOWN...HE WAS JUST SICK IN THE HEAD FROM THAT UNION THING!!

?

...HE CHASED THIS GOON THAT BEAT HIM UP... CAUGHT UP WITH HIM IN YER LUMBER YARD -THEY HAD A FIGHT...A FIRE STARTED...

..ULP

BUT, IF MAX SAVED YOUR LIFE, ANGELO...HOW?

..ER... LET IT BE... JACOB!.. C'MON UP! YOUR FAMILY IS WAITING TO TALK TO YOU!!

ELTON, ...HERE'S JACOB!

GOOD...NOW SIT DOWN EVERYONE. I'VE GOT ALOT TO TELL YOU ALL

121

FIRST OF ALL ... THE POLICE REPORT THAT THE FIRE WAS **ACCIDENTAL**! THERE WAS A BRAWL IN WHICH MAX WAS SHOT BY A KNOWN HOODLUM NAMED GINO ... HE, TOO, DIED IN THE FIRE!

THIS RULES OUT ARSON ... SO, THE INSURANCE COMPANY WILL PAY WITHOUT PROTEST! THIS WILL GIVE YOU SOME MONEY TO REBUILD THE LUMBER YARD!

NOW YOU CAN **MODERNIZE** THE PLACE. PUT IN A SAW FOR CUSTOM MILLING TO MAKE THE YARD MORE PROFITABLE!

... WHICH, BY THE WAY, WILL REASSURE THE **STOCKHOLDERS**! NOW, WHILE YOUR STOCK **WILL** DROP SOME ON THE MARKET ... THERE WILL **NOT BE A PANIC** SELL-OFF

YOU CAN ALSO PLEDGE SOME OF YOUR STOCK FOR A BANK LOAN ... FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND ADVERTISING .. SO, LOMBARDI LUMBER WILL WIND UP AS A **GOOD INVESTMENT**

ELTON, HOW ABOUT PETE AN THE 'HOT' LUMBER ... ARE WE GOIN' TO TAKE THE RAP AS A FENCE?

NO (CHUCKLE) SINCE THE OFFICE BURNED DOWN, ALL THE RECORDS WERE DESTROYED ... SO YOU'RE IN THE CLEAR!!

A CLEAN SLATE, ANGELO !!

Y'HEAR? ... IT'S A NEW START, JACOB ... A NEW START!

122

...AND, NOW, THE BIG NEWS! REBECCA AND I WERE **MARRIED** YESTERDAY AT CITY HALL

POPPA, POPPA, SAY SOMETHING!

MOZZLE TOV!

OH, POPPA, **THANKS**, THANKS

THANK YOU, JACOB

...DID YOU TELL MOMMA YET?...WHERE IS SHE?

IN BED, POPPA!

DANNY..?! WHAT ARE **YOU** DOING HERE?

WHEN MOMMA HEARD THE NEWS SHE HAD A MILD **HEART ATTACK**...I CAME OVER TO GIVE HER A SEDATIVE!

SHE'LL BE **OKAY**... WITH LOTS OF REST AND A LITTLE CARE.

POPPA ARE YOU ALRIGHT? I MEAN, YOUR HEART?

MY HEART IS ALRIGHT ...THE REST OF ME I'M NOT SO SURE!

WELL, FOLKS, WHY DONT WE ALL GO NOW! ...LET POPPA'N MOMMA BE **ALONE** FOR A LITTLE WHILE!?

123

NOO?

... AND WHO DO I THANK FOR ALL THIS?

SO, WHY NOT THANK GOD?

REBBE BENSOHN?

I BROUGHT A LITTLE HOT CHICKEN SOUP! ...I KNOW RIFKA WONT BE ABLE TO COOK FOR A FEW DAYS.

THANK YOU... THAT'S VERY NICE!

ARE YOU ALRIGHT, JACOB?

SO, HOW SHOULD I BE?? I'M VERY CONFUSED!

ONLY THE TRUE BELIEVER IS NOT CONFUSED!

AH, JACOB, I HAVE HERE A LETTER YOU SHOULD GIVE TO FRIEDA GOLD. IT'S FROM THE JEWISH AGENCY

Dear Rabbi Bensohn;

We have reason to believe that the mother of Hilda Fremd may be known to you. Her name is Frieda Gold. If you can contact her please advise her that her daughter escaped from Germany and is now living in Jerusalem.

She is quite ill, having suffered much during her escape. Her husband was imprisoned by the Nazis and she is without support.

If her mother could be of any financial assistance we would see to it that any funds she can send would be applied for her daughter's benefit.

Yours Truly
JEWISH AGENCY

JACOB, LET ME KNOW IF YOU NEED ANYTHING

YES, YES... THANK YOU, REBBE

JACOB, IS THAT YOU?

YES, RIFKA... THE REBBE BROUGHT YOU A LITTLE CHICKEN SOUP!

HERE, TAKE A LITTLE... YOU'LL FEEL BETTER!

AHHHHH SO, JACOB... YOU CHANGED YOUR MIND, MAYBE, AND YOU CAME BACK

WELL, NOT EXACTLY, YOU SEE I...

LISTEN, JACOB, ITS ALRIGHT BY ME... I KNOW IT WAS **AGGRAVATION** FROM YOUR BUSINESS... DON'T WORRY, I UNDERSTAND

WELL, ... WE DO HAVE A LOT OF TROUBLE THERE.. I...

B'URP ALREADY I'M FEELING A LITTLE BETTER YAWN...

GO TO SLEEP NOW, RIFKA... I'LL STAY, TONIGHT, HERE... TOMORROW WE CAN TALK MORE!

I KNEW IT WASN'T JUST ANOTHER WOMAN ... AFTER ALL, A MAN YOUR AGE COULDN'T BE SUCH A SHLEMIEL!

125

BLIP BLUP BLUP BLUP

MMMMM

FRIEDA!! SO, SAY SOMETHING! FOR A WHOLE HOUR YOU SAT THERE LOOKING AT THAT LETTER!

WHAT IS THERE TO SAY??

I'M GOING TO MY DAUGHTER IN PALESTINE RIGHT AWAY!

SO, I'LL GO WITH YOU.

NO! JACOB, I'M GOING ALONE!

126

BUT, FRIEDA, WHAT ABOUT **US**?!

THIS IS **NOT** YOUR PROBLEM..IT'S **MY** DAUGHTER...SHE NEEDS **ME** NOW.... THANK GOD SHE ESCAPED!

JACOB, JACOB, JACOB...

WHAT CAN I GIVE YOU NOW? **MY HEART IS WITH MY CHILD!!**

YOU ARE TAKING WITH YOU **MY DREAM**!

NO... I'M **GIVING** YOU A DREAM...

IN A YEAR, WRITE TO ME...MAYBE BY THEN MY DAUGHTER WILL BE WELL...AND THEN, MAYBE, WE CAN TALK ABOUT OUR FUTURE... SO, MEANWHILE, IF YOU WANT, YOU HAVE YOUR DREAM!

MAYBE, MAYBE, MAYBE, MAYBE!

ISN'T MAYBE BETTER THAN NOTHING ??

NOO... **SO**, I SUPPOSE IT'S MORE THAN A COCKROACH HAS!!

JACOB, ARE YOU THERE ?

YES, RIFKA, I'M JUST HANGING UP MY CLOTHES IN THE CLOSET.

TSK-TSK! YOU CAN'T PUT AWAY A WRINKLED SUIT! LET ME HANE IT... I'LL IRON IT..

PLEASE! IT'S TOO MUCH FOR YOU.. YOU SHOULD BE IN BED RESTING!

ME ??...HA, LOOK AT **YOU**!! YOU LOOK TERRIBLE! I'LL GO MAKE YOU A GLASS TEA... SIT DOWN AND REST YOURSELF !

JACOB ...YOU GOTTA TALK TO THE SUPER... HE SHOULD GET AN EXTERMINATOR UP HERE... WE STILL GOT **COCKROACHES** IN THE HOUSE !!

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OH, JACOB!! CALL ANGELO...HE WANTS YOU SHOULD MEET HIM AT THE LUMBER YARD...THE WORKERS ARE COMING TO FIX UP!!...ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME, JACOB?!

AS FAR AS WE KNOW, THE COCKROACH IS NOT AN ENDANGERED SPECIES. ITS POPULATION ON THE EARTH IS UNRECORDED. ITS PROLIFERATION ON A GLOBAL SCALE SEEMS UNAFFECTED BY THE GROWTH IN HUMAN POPULATION...WHO REGARD IT AS A THREAT TO THEIR NEED FOR A SANITARY ENVIRONMENT.

IN NORTH TEMPERATE ZONES, THE INSECT MOULTS ABOUT 13 TIMES. IT REACHES MATURITY ABOUT SIX MONTHS AFTER HATCHING. IN WARMER CLIMATES IT COMPLETES ITS LIFE CYCLE OVER A PERIOD OF ROUGHLY TWELVE TO THIRTEEN MONTHS. IT SEEMS MAINLY PREOCCUPIED WITH FEEDING AND REPRODUCTION. FOR ALL THEIR LONG INHABITATION OF THIS PLANET THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE THAT THE COCKROACH HAS EVOLVED GENETICALLY OR ALTERED ITS LIFE EXPECTANCY. IT HAS AN UNQUESTIONABLE LIFE FORCE EVIDENCED BY ITS WILL TO LIVE!

PRELUDE TO GLORY

Before Will Eisner marched to war, some civilian details needed attention: a complaining publisher, putrid features, gruesome dailies, squeamish editors, tardy artists, excitable fans, mercenary wenches, an anti-Semitic Nazi hater, and, oh yes, The Spirit...

By Cat Yronwode

As seen in the first installment [*Quarterly 4*] of this documentary trip through the Quality Comics shop of the early 1940s, Everett (Busy) Arnold was one of the toughest editors any writer or artist could hope to please. His technique of paying high rates for good talent and then complaining constantly about his contributors' shortcomings in an attempt to "heat them up" or "put the needle on" kept his staff and freelancers on edge.

In addition to publishing some of the best comics of that era—*National, Smash, Doll Man, Uncle Sam, Military, Police, Hit,* etc.—Arnold's Quality shop also oversaw the production of Will Eisner's weekly *Spirit* comic book, which was syndicated to newspapers through the Register and Tribune Syndicate. *The Spirit,* conceived as a slightly more "adult" comic than Quality's newsstand titles, often ran afoul of editorial kibitzing from Arnold, the syndicate, and the editors of the individual papers that subscribed to it. The bulk of the complaints were summed up by Busy Arnold when he apologized to the syndicate for Eisner's use of "risky" concepts, which were possibly even "improper, obscene, in bad taste."

Despite the criticism—and what art flourishes without rocking a few boats?—plans called for Eisner to begin work on a daily syndicated *Spirit* strip. This was to be a continuing adventure series that had no reference to the complete-in-one-issue weekly comic book.

In addition to these daily and weekly chores, Eisner also continued as editor/art director for certain newsstand comic books published by the Quality Comics Group. And, undeterred by affidavits swearing to his absolute irreplaceability in the comics industry, with World War II looming, his draft board had classified him as eligible for service.

On September 3, 1941, Henry Martin of the syndicate received the first batch of Eisner's daily episodes. He found them "fine" and "grand"—and proceeded to forward a page-long list of script rewrites the syndicate considered necessary to maintain the character of Police Commissioner Dolan as a "high class citizen." Among the requested changes were the substitution of the word "shooting" for "murder" and the replacement of "scared" with "worried." A look at the episodes as printed reveals that all the changes were carried out, because the lettering on the replacement words is subtly different than that in the rest of the balloons.

Martin went on to add his customary caution about Eisner's "character faces [which] are still pretty horrible to look at and will probably cause some objections." He cautioned Busy Arnold to remind Eisner that they would have to be more "careful with the daily strips than

with the [weekly] book itself."

On September 22, Will's second batch of dailies was delivered to the syndicate, and again met with praise from both Henry Martin and the syndicate's managing editor, Charles Lounsbury, who each wrote separate letters of comment. Both letters concluded with orders to change a sequence in which The Spirit was supposed to knock out a policeman in order to steal his clothes. "We can't have the Spirit socking a cop," wrote Martin. Lounsbury was slightly more delicate:

"In strip no. 14, 'The Spirit' socks a cop and exchanges clothing. Actually, the striking of a representative of the law isn't in keeping with 'the Spirit's' high ideals and all-round cleverness in affecting a means to an end. Therefore. . .in panel 4 [show] the Spirit and his old friend, Officer Blank, exchanging clothing with the officer remarking something about his hope that The Spirit will be successful in his present daring adventure to win out on the side of right."

As the strip was already late, Lounsbury asked Eisner to send a replacement panel by air mail special delivery and promised to paste it up and "block out the bound and gagged cop lying behind the garbage pail" in the last panel.

Eisner did not redraw the panel as asked. Instead he telegraphed a reply to Lounsbury as follows:

"Your suggestion might compromise policeman. Suggest you kill socking scene and join resulting panels keeping undressed cop. Implication will be same, however, so if still objectionable will redraw sequence entirely and get in mail by tonight, since strip 19 refers to cop found without clothes. Advise at once."

Lounsbury's reply telegram was to the point:

"Under circumstances and due to extreme importance of early strips believe redrawing entire sequence most advisable."

Will cooperated, redrawing the sequence in pantomime, and arranging for the Spirit to steal the clothes off a tailor's dummy rather than assault an officer and take them by force.

THE FIRST 19 SPIRIT DAILIES — INCLUDING MANY NEVER-BEFORE-REPRINTED— ARE IN THIS ISSUE, BEGINNING ON PAGE 36.

Meanwhile, despite problems with the daily *Spirit*, Eisner also had to do his share of editorial work for the Quality line. Arnold hated the artwork running in "The Sniper" and "Miss America" features. In the first installment of this article, Arnold's letter of August 20, 1941, referred to "The Sniper" art as "crude" and "awful" while calling "Miss America" "the worst I have ever seen." His opinion of the features didn't improve, and thereafter he sent Eisner complaints almost once a week about these strips.

[September 12, 1941] "I certainly hope you can get somebody to replace the man who now does 'Miss America.' In my opinion, this is about the worst artwork in any comic magazine and I think that features like this don't do us any good. It is the features with artwork like 'Blackhawk' which seem to have the necessary appeal.

[September 17, 1941] "Please don't supply any more art work for *Military* by the artists who did 'Miss America' and 'The Sniper.' They are awful so get Jerry Robinson on these two features—he to do everything except the lettering. 'Sniper' is a good idea but this artist is impossible—also 'Miss America' artist."

Apparently this nagging problem was solved on September 24, when Arnold wrote asking Will to "get [Jerry] Robinson working on 5 pages of 'The Sniper' (one issue only, then back to 6 pages) and get [Jim] Mooney to take over 'Miss America' ($12.50 per page, we to furnish the story).

"Have Dick French write the first 7 page episode of 'Mr. V' (may change title) for *Smash* so Robinson can start this just as soon as he does 'The Sniper.' But send us the story here before Robinson starts work on it so we can make any corrections. Don't let Robinson get away from us on these two features.

"Better let me have a story for 'Blackhawk' for Bob Fujitani to finish. Keep charging 4 weeks salary per issue to (Chuck) Cuidera and then it doesn't cost much for a quarterly—only Bob's pencil work."

Lou Fine, one of the best—and most collected—of Golden Age comic book artists, was hard at work on a number of features in late September, 1941, as Busy Arnold again took up his litany of grievances against Eisner's Tudor City, Man-

One of the Lou Fine covers Busy Arnold complained about, showing a thin Uncle Sam. January 1941.

hattan, studio:

". . .It is very important that Lou tries to improve both 'The Ray' and 'The Black Condor.' Also, have him try to get ahead on these two features since he is pretty close to 'deadline' on them.

"The March *National* cover isn't so hot since the figures were too small. Try and dope out a good cover for April *National Comics* and have Lou make Uncle Sam look stronger than he did in Feb. and Mar. On both these covers Lou made Uncle Sam altogether too thin. He looked like he was about ready to break in two.

"Make 'The Ray' [scripts] light with Happy Terrill in the role of a 'happy go lucky' reporter when he isn't operating as 'The Ray.' Lou has a tendency to play up the gruesome end which is okay once in a while but not as a steady dish."

Once Eisner roughed out the covers Busy had requested, they were sent in for approval. Busy didn't like them:

"I don't think that either of these covers are 'too hot,' " he wrote, although he did not ask for specific changes to be made. And as usual, his unhappiness with Lou Fine's deadline problems proved to be all bluster, for he added in a post script: "Don't have Lou rush the next 9 pages of 'The Black Condor' even if Jerry tries to put on the 'heat' as I want an unusual job."

After the problem with *The Spirit* daily in which a policeman was socked, it would seem that the syndicate became ever more watchful of Eisner's efforts at originality. On September 29, 1941, an entire six-day batch of strips was returned by Chuck Lounsbury for redrawing because it contained "the wheeling of the draped body [of Squire Sampson] into the morgue, the interior view of the morgue, [a] reference in the balloons to corpses, the Spirit climbing off a death slab" and other material "simply too ghastly for editors' consumption."

Will complied, redrawing the offending sequence overnight and submitting the reworked version on October 1. His accompanying note explained that he "dropped the corpse sequence entirely and moved up the succeeding installments into the last half of the 22nd strip." Calling the change "a blessing in disguise," he noted that now the plot moved forward faster. However, the constant string of complaints was taking its toll for he also asked if he and Lounsbury couldn't "get together in the future and thrash out a fixed policy" of what was and wasn't acceptable, since so far his only guidelines had been "past criticism and the published work of rival syndicates."

Lounsbury's response was very cordial. He advised that in the future Eisner send

pencilled strips to the syndicate for approval and he promised to air mail them back. This would ensure that Will never had to completely redraw and re-ink an entire sequence again. (In today's world of cheap photocopies and overnight express delivery, such editorial conferences are far easier, with no risk of losing precious original artwork).

Just as these early problems with the daily *Spirit* were being resolved, the weekly *Spirit* once again went beyond the limitations imposed by conservative editors. The first to protest was Busy Arnold, who wrote on October 3, "I think the October 19 issue of *The Spirit* was absolutely the worst you have done to date and I don't think you should run any more stories in this groove. This particular episode was altogether too heavy and profound. It is on the philosophical side and will not interest most readers. I think you should make *The Spirit* more along its usual lines with a good interesting story and plenty of sustained rapid fire action."

The "profound" and "philosophical" story Arnold disliked was later to be mentioned by Jules Feiffer in *The Great Comic Book Heroes* as one of the best of Eisner's fables, a future-time fantasy entitled "The Oldest Man in the World." [Reprinted in *The Art of Will Eisner*]. In addition to its complex story-within-a-story construction, this episode also featured some of Eisner's best early use of sophisticated colouring techniques, such as surprints and colour holds. Those met with resistance too, as a letter from A.J. Cardenas of Editors Press Service, Inc., pointed out on October 16. Complaining that the work "appears to us to be lacking in color," Cardenas went on to say that "the fault is not with the engravings of the press work, but it appears to be with the artist, who chose a wrong color scheme." The story was not yet in print, but Cardenas wrote that "we are anticipating receiving some unfavorable comments from our subscribers and we pass this information on to you for your records."

No record of any "unfavorable comments" exists, and it is possible that Cardenas' letter was part of an editorial move to forestall further colour experiments by Eisner.

An undated and cryptic note from Busy to Eisner, written sometime in October, 1941, mentioned that Will was falling behind on his deadlines. Busy asked that Eisner assign a "naval Spirit story" to artist Alden McWilliams. This story, as it appears from the context of the letter, was supposed to appear after the December 14 and 21 weekly issues of *The Spirit*, but no "naval" *Spirit* story was printed then, or for many months after, so it seems as if Eisner caught up on his dead-

lines and managed to avoid McWilliams having to do a fill-in.

Further reference to the apparently non-existent McWilliams story occurred in a letter from Arnold to Eisner dated October 17. In this letter, Busy also revealed that "Ed" [Cronin] would be leaving Quality Comics at the end of that month, and urged Will to send the Arnold studio as much finished art as his Tudor City studio could produce before Cronin left, to ensure it being proofread and corrected in time to meet deadlines. (Cronin subsequently went to work for Hillman Periodicals, another comic book publisher.)

The letter of October 17 is also interesting in that it mentions a sales statement on "the October issue of *Military Comics.*" The statement itself is no longer attached, but Arnold's comment—"at least we didn't lose any money on it"—suggests that sales were not as high as expected. Despite this disappointment, Arnold asked Will to get his team ahead on "Blackhawk" stories so that a *Blackhawk Quarterly* could be scheduled.

"When is Dick [French] going to write the first seven page story for 'Mr V'?" he asked. "I am anxious to get Jerry Robinson started on this. But have Dick do a better job than he did on the 'Espionage' story, which was putrid."

Busy finally rid himself of the troublesome "Miss America" (the last episode appeared in *Military Comics* No. 7, cover-dated March, 1942), so he next turned his attentions to the shortcomings of Sam Rosen's lettering in the daily and weekly *Spirit.* According to Busy, Sam "uses a straight line with no loop for a comma and this is very bad." Busy Arnold was not comfortable, it seems, without something to criticize.

The month of October closed at the Quality shop with doubts about Jerry Robinson having time enough to do "X of the Underground" (formerly referred to as "Mr. V"). Tex Blaisdell also wrote to "Yankee Eagle" artist Bill Smith informing him that although "Yankee Eagle" was being terminated (the last appeared in *Military Comics* No. 8), Dick French would be scripting a new series for him to illustrate very soon.

With the daily *Spirit* beginning to see print, the first comments it aroused from newspaper editors were discouraging.

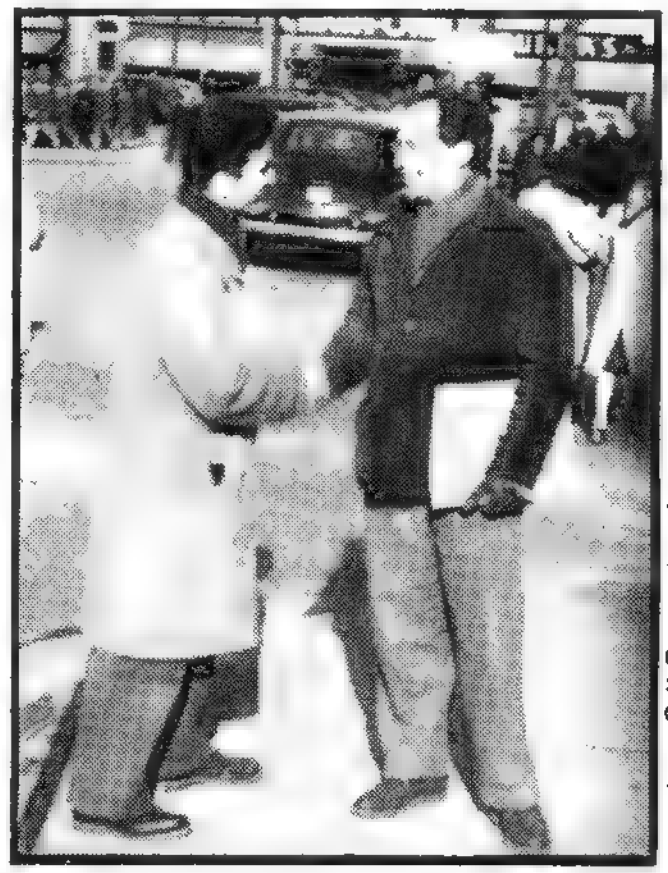
"Complicated plots," said William F. Hawkes, managing editor of the *Philadelphia Record.*

"Too heavy," said the editor of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune.*

But the fans saw it differently. Harriet B. Wetrich of the syndicate wrote Eisner on October 31 to inform him that "we had a letter from a youngster in New Jersey saying that he and a group of his friends had formed a club called 'The Ebony's' after Ebony in the *Newark Star-Ledger.*" The boy requested a drawing of Ebony from Will, which he gladly produced.

The impossibility of pleasing both editors and fans was brought home directly in late November, 1941. In one week, the syndicate forwarded a fan letter from a reader named Betty Feaster, who felt *The Spirit* was not as exciting as it had once been—and Frank Clark of the syndicate criticized Will for showing a murder in one of the dailies, on the grounds that the strip was too gruesome for the common reader. The pull and push of newspaper and syndicate editors, who want a "clean" and innocuous story, and readers, who want an exciting and absorbing one, was not new then, nor has it ceased today. Lucky is the creator who can please both parties. Lucky, and unusual.

The Register and Tribune Syndicate was not tightly run. It was hard for Will to satisfy the editors because he rarely got personalized editorial direction. A syndicate like the Chicago Tribune/Daily News Syndicate—where Captain Joseph Patterson took such a personal interest in his features that he named them, recommended research books for his creators to read, and suggested plots—could be seen as more confining, but to a new writer, artist, it also represented a far more secure situation than the benevolent anarchy prevalent at the Register and Tribune.



courtesy Gill Fox collection

Tony DiPreta (left) and Lou Fine in Stamford, CT, December 1941.

Eisner, just a tyro at the daily strip game, had been writing and drawing dailies for over two months—and his first strips were in print—before he had an actual meeting with one of his editors. In a letter to Henry Martin dated November 12, 1941, he commented that meeting Chuck Lounsbury and discussing the material then in progress was "most helpful and instructive." There is a note of relief in his letter that hints at the confusion he had been feeling as his dailies came back over and over with cryptic comments about their weaknesses, while no positive guidelines were ever given to him.

Eisner finally seemed to hit the chord the syndicate was asking for when he produced a short "comic sequence" featuring Ebony. This pleased Lounsbury greatly, although one wonders what fan Betty Feaster thought of it, lacking as it did the "excitement" the syndicate found so troublesome.

Today's fans often regard the humourous Ebony stories as tinged with racism, but here again, it was the editors who wanted this type of material, not Eisner. (The 1946 weekly *Spirit* episodes reflect another strong period of editorial dominance, when humour—especially that featuring Ebony—was the order of the day). Left to his own devices, Eisner seemed more inclined to write "profound" and "philosophical" stories, which met with editorial disapproval, but which are now considered "classics."

Another point on which fans of comic strips always disagree with editors is the best length for adventure continuities. In the early 1940s, it was not uncommon for a daily sequence to run as long as six months. Today the accepted editorial wisdom is that stories should last no longer than six weeks—but most strip fans consider this a dreadful outrage. Pity poor Eisner, then, in 1941, when Chuck Lounsbury told him that "any story told in comic strip is apt to bog down if it runs three or four weeks"!

With the daily strips firmly underway, attention turned to the preparation of Quality's newsstand comic books. Gill Fox had taken over Ed Cronin's proofreading and art direction chores in Arnold's Quality studio in Stamford, Connecticut, for it was he who found and fixed a name error in the December dailies. That Cronin was still around, or his influence still felt, is implied by Arnold's comments to Will on December 12 about the upcoming *Uncle Sam Quarterly:* "I don't believe you should let Ed Cronin go through with the original plans on this magazine, but should have new up-to-the minute stories written for the third issue." Arnold also requested that Eisner refrain from producing any more "illustrated poetry" for the comic book, "since this doesn't 'ring the bell' with kids."

Arnold's attitude toward his star artist, Lou Fine, was revealed in a note he wrote on December 17. Despite receiving the highest rate Quality was paying at the time to freelancers, Lou was not producing his work on time, and Arnold was chafing, as any publisher would under the circumstances:

"Called Lou Fine after I talked to you yesterday but there was no answer. I certainly have to make some change in the situation there since the few pages Lou does each month cost me too much money. And his stuff is altogether too confusing and doesn't sell comic magazines. Guess my 'best bet' is to wish Lou off on Demby [comic book writer Emanuel Dem-

by ran his own shop at this time] unless we could make some deal for him to help you on *The Spirit* and freelance features for me."

It would be months before this situation was resolved, but eventually, when Eisner was drafted, Lou Fine did take over the art chores on *The Spirit*, presumably making Busy Arnold happier about him.

Arnold's worries about the amount of money he was paying Lou Fine were no doubt compounded by the sales figures he saw on his books. As he wrote to Will in the same letter, "*Military* [sales] reports (like all the other magazines) are awful and I can't imagine what is the trouble with this magazine. Publishing bi-monthly should help sales a little bit, but not too much." Then as now, publishing comics was not a shortcut to wealth. [See sidebar on Jerry Iger on the next page.]

December of 1941 brought a new flood of editorial reprimands to Eisner from the syndicate. A reader of the *Des Moines Register* complained that he had "small children that study the comics and if this comic is continued in your newspaper, I will cancel my subscription." The offending sequence in this case was one in which a vampiric yogi bit a man in the neck.

This was followed by "a criticism and a request" from Detroit. "Clean up your filthy cartoons" was the message sent in by "a father of three," who had problems with a daily strip featuring nightclub singer Dolly DeVere, who sang her own pre-Springsteen version of "Spirit in the Night."

This time, however, the syndicate, confident in the sales appeal of the series, did not give Eisner a rough time. Instead, they reassured him that certain people always objected to the comics, and let him know that he was doing all right as far as they were concerned.

On December 23, Frank Clark of the syndicate's head office sent the following comment to Eisner:

"I put this [latest] copy through the crucial test to which I frequently submit material. I took it along when I left my desk, sat for 10 minutes reading it and pondering, came back to my desk and found that I still had it in my hand. It had passed the test—I had used the paper provided on the spool in the little booth.

"It's that good."

Will replied in the same vein on December 30: "Something noteworthy sud-

TOP: this daily panel prompted a Des Moines reader to complain: "If that isn't something for a great newspaper to print. I have small children that study the comics and if this comic 'The Spirit' is continued... I will cancel my subscription. You must get stuff like that free."

BOTTOM: A Detroit reader complained that this daily sequence was "filthy."

denly occurs to me. Many of the sketches sent to you are indeed conceived in the same place you choose to read them. Surely, here is a coincidence of almost occult significance. I confess, sir. . .it. . .it frightens me."

B.M. McKelway of the *Washington Star*, who, six months previously, had addressed the sharpest sort of criticism to Eisner for his premature anti-Nazi stance, now attacked Eisner's shop for desecrating Old Glory. In a telegram dated January 21, 1942, he wrote: "See page nine comic book January 18th. This desecration of flag violates local flag law and probably many states. Please caution comic people against repetition." The page referred to is in the "Lady Luck" episode. Since the editors at the syndicate had missed this, too, no blame attached to Eisner or his staff, and things went on as usual.

"Usual," for the *Washington Star*, meant expressing heavy doubts about Will's ability to "Keep [his] material within limits that will be more nearly in line with 'The Star's' character." On January 31, Philip H. Love of *The Star* wrote to complain about the "unnecessary voluptuousness of some of the women in the release for February 15." (The episode in question is "Madam Minx," and yes, she is definitely "voluptuous"). Love was more upset by the daily *Spirit* releases for February 2 through 5. These dealt once again with Hitler, of whom (as can be seen from last issue) Philip H. Love seemed rather fond. Love invariably took Hitler's part whenever Eisner made fun of the German leader or—as in this case—introduced a character who was determined to kill Der Fuehrer.

This time Love went farther than he ever had before. He rewrote Eisner's daily sequence so that Hitler would not be named.

"We don't want Hitler in our comic strips," he declared. "Our strips are fictional, and we don't want to get them mixed up with real people. . .Obviously, we would not use the strips in their present form, so we have had fictional names substituted for the real ones. Germany becomes Tyrania, Hitler is Herman Musser the Dictator of Tyrania, etc. . . *The Star's* policy is to keep opinion and propaganda out of the columns; to keep its features within the bounds of fairness and good taste; to let the Army, the Navy and the Marines fight the war. There is no place on our comic pages for material that goes beyond the bounds of our policy of restraint, conservatism, fairness and good taste."

On that note, the *Washington Star* ceased its complaints, and was not heard from again.

Policies and "fairness and good taste" were far looser in the field of newsstand comic books. Plans went on in the Quality shop to produce adventures of the Army, Navy, Marines and Blackhawks fighting all manner of Krauts, Nips and homebound Fifth Columnists.

Busy Arnold, up in Stamford, was worrying about late scripts for "Secret War News" and "The Atlantic Patrol," two features Alden McWilliams was scheduled to draw for *Military Comics*. On January 6, he also took up his former complaints about the inadequacies of Nick Viscardi's art on "Lady Luck": "Pretty sloppy. . .very second rate for the past few months. . .not good enough for a newspaper section. . ."

OH, A THIEF OF LOVE WAS I .... STOLEN HEARTS AND BROKEN SIGHS LITTLE MATTERED TO ME — LIKE A KNAVE OF HEARTS YOU SEE ....
BUT— I WAS CAUGHT DEAD TO [redacted] .....BY THE SPIRIT IN THE NIGHT ---
MY CRIMES WERE AT AN END ...
NOW --I'M THE ONE IN LOVE— AND --AS GENTLE AS A DOVE— FOR— THE SPIRIT'S GOT ME!!
?

"Send Jerry some smelling

Terrible news surfaced on the day after Christmas, December 26, 1941, when Arnold wrote a statement of accounts to Jerry Iger, whose shop still produced many features for Quality, despite the breakup of Iger's and Eisner's partnership nearly two years before.

"The total combined loss on *Hit Comics* and *National Comics* for the June to November, 1941 issues (six issues of each) was $10,704.87," Arnold declared. He and Iger had a contract covering profit sharing on the titles, above and beyond the have-to page rate Iger charged for the features his shop produced. In addition, Iger was the exclusive supplier of finished material for the two comics and took an agent's commission on all pages in the two and for those features produced by his shop for other Quality titles.

After predicting that "for the period of June 1941 to February 1942 we will lose nearly $20,000.00 on these two comics," Arnold handed Iger the heavy blow. "You must realize that we cannot operate any longer under the terms of our agreement of July 21, 1941, and this letter is to officially cancel all past deals on *Hit Comics* and *National Comics* effective with the April issue of each magazine. By then we are going to be in the red for a total of almost $25,000.00 and, if we are going to buy any material from you in the future for these magazines, it must be on an entirely new setup. Incidentally, *Hit Comics* is now on a permanent bi-monthly basis and I plan to drop the May and July issues of *National Comics* so that temporarily this book is also on a bi-monthly basis."

The carbon copy attachment to Eisner carried a little handwritten note from Arnold: "Maybe you better send Jerry some smelling salts and flowers." Iger probably needed them after getting this devastating letter. Iger was going to have to accept an unconditional cut of almost $5 a page on all work for Quality. His profit-sharing deals (20% of net profits on *National*, 30% on *Hit*) were unilaterally cancelled, and Arnold let Iger know that the matter was not negotiable.

Because it names artists and their features, as well as revealing details about the state of the comic book industry at the time, further paragraphs of the letter are worth quoting:

"Strictly on a month by month basis," Arnold wrote, "I will buy the following material for these two magazines in the future:

NATIONAL COMICS

6 pages 'Kid Patrol' (by artist who did April issue).....$75
6 pages 'Sally O'Neil' (by [Al] Bryant).....$90
5 pages 'Prop Powers' (by [Wilmer] Williams).....$75
5 pages 'Wonder Boy' (by [Al] Bryant).....$75
5 pages 'Kid Dixon' (by [Klaus] Nordling).....$60

HIT COMICS

6 pages 'Betty Bates' (by [Al] Bryant).....$90
6 pages 'The Red Ree' (by [Wilmer] Williams.....$90
5 pages 'The Strange Twins' (by [Alex] Blum).....$75
7 pages 'Dan Glory' (by [Arthur] Peddy).....$105
5 pages 'Bob and Swab' (by [Klaus] Nordling).....$60

"All of the above features (except those done by Nordling) are at the rate of $15 per page which is a fair price with conditions as they are in the comic magazine field. . . You are only paying Nordling $10 per page for his work and since he completes everything and writes his own story, $12 per page is a fair price for 'Kid Dixon' and 'Bob and Swab.' If you prefer, I will buy these stories direct from Nordling and pay him $12 per page.

"I may have Lou Fine or Chuck Cuidera handle 'Stormy Foster' starting with the June issue of *Hit Comics*. However, this feature is very second rate and it hasn't any character. So unless Lou or another top notch artist can do a first class job on it right away, I will get another lead for the magazine.

"I am also losing money on *Smash Comics* and *Police Comics* and I can only afford to pay you the following rates for your material in these two magazines in the future:

SMASH COMICS

6 pages 'Rookie Rankin' (by [Arthur] Peddy).....$90
5 pages 'The Purple Trio' (by [Alex] Blum).....$75

POLICE COMICS

6 pages 'Phantom Lady' (by [Arthur] Peddy).....$90
5 pages 'Eagle Evans' (by [Wilmer] Williams).....$75
5 pages 'Steele Kerrigan' (by [Al] Bryant).....$75

"Although *Feature Comics* is still operating at a profit, it has dropped considerably in recent months and we can only afford to pay the following prices for your material in the future:

FEATURE COMICS

5 pages 'Zero, Ghost Detective' (by [Al] Bryant).....$75
5 pages 'Slamar' (by April 'Kid Patrol' artist).....$75
5 pages 'Span Shaw' (by [Wilmer] Williams).....$75

"I will continue to pay you $20 per page for [Reed] Crandall's features on a month by month basis. However, I am not sure whether I will keep 'The Firebrand' in *Feature Comics* much longer as a six page feature after I jump 'Plastic Man' into the lead position in this magazine. Like 'Stormy Foster,' 'The Firebrand' is very second rate, even with Reed handling the art work.

"It is understood that you will supply better and more timely stories for all of the above features and will give first class art work on all this material.

salts and flowers"

"In closing may I take a crack at the statement in your letter of December 4 where you say, 'Maybe I'm a fool, but I've turned down considerable business so that I may better serve you in your books. What do I get in return?' Are you trying to be funny or do you think I am a bit simple? You never turned down any business because of me and grabbed off all the accounts you could get from such magazines as *Pocket Comics*, *Champ Comics* and *Speed Comics*. Aren't you the same Jerry Iger who started *Great Comics* and *Chance Comics* with Fred Fiore even though you were supposed to be concentrating on producing extra good work for E. M. Arnold and Thurman Scott? Don't make me laugh, Jerry.

"And please don't tell me again that you personally developed every top-notcher in this business including Bill Eisner. He was largely responsible for the success of Eisner & Iger, as you well know. Bill always was a swell artist with a flair for writing interesting plots and nobody helped develop him except Wm. E. Eisner, a lot of natural ability and plenty of good hard work."

Some names in the above paragraphs need explanation. *Pocket*, *Champ* and *Speed Comics* were all published by Harvey, the same outfit later to gain fame for presenting the adventures of *Richie Rich*. *Great* and *Chance Comics* were the products of the short lived Great Publications, and only lasted three issues each in 1941-42. The role played by Fred Fiore in these titles is unknown, but it is probably safe to assume from the context of the letter that he was the publisher, that the Iger shop produced all the material in both titles, and that Iger may have been a partner. Thurman Scott, known to his friends as "Scottie", was the publisher of the Fiction House line of comics, for which the Eisner & Iger shop produced a large amount of material.

Arnold's letter to Iger continued:

"As regards the $10,000 you paid Bill for his share of the business [Eisner & Iger], may I remind you that I had nothing to do with this and it was a matter entirely between Wm. E. Eisner and S. M. Iger. We paid you several thousand dollars [as per the profit sharing arrangement] as a split on the first ten issues of *Hit Comics* and *National Comics* after Bill sold out to you and you got plenty of more from Scottie about the same time. So I guess the deal you made with Bill was pretty fair to you both." [The deal referred to Iger buying out Eisner's interest in Eisner & Iger when Will joined Arnold to work for Quality and began *The Spirit*. Among the properties Iger bought from Eisner was *Sheena*, which Iger continued to produce for Thurman Scott for many years.]

Arnold's letter stated that *National Comics* would skip May and July, 1942, while *Smash* and *Police Comics* would skip April and June. This further cut into Iger's income, but Arnold promised to put the books back on a monthly schedule when sales picked up later in the year. His concern for Klaus Nordling—whose work he admired, even while he paid him less than most other artists—caused Arnold to offer Nordling's "Pen Miller" feature a slot in *Crack Comics*. "But," he added, "I can't afford to give you an agent's fee of more that $2 per page for Nordling's feature."

"In closing may I ask you to deliver the balance of the material for issue No. 2 of *The Doll Man Quarterly* just as soon as possible. You are three months late in delivering the book, with the result that we have to call issue No. 2 Spring instead of Winter. . ."

Deadline problems and delayed shipping dates are nothing new in this industry, it seems.

And, as usual, he reprimanded Viscardi for his "faked shots" of distant perspectives. January 13 saw more of the same: "Will you please have Nick spend more time on his backgrounds and eliminate the free-hand sloppy type of stuff. . .'Lady Luck' for the past couple of months has been awful—not even comic book quality." It wouldn't be too long before Viscardi was replaced on the feature by Klaus Nordling, whose work Arnold liked a great deal.

Chuck Cuidera, the foremost artist on the "Blackhawk" feature, was facing induction, so efforts were made to have him speed up production and get far ahead in case he was drafted. A letter from Eisner to Arnold dated January 19 sets forth a plan to have Tex Blaisdell pencil and "Chop" [Cuidera] ink four or five "Blackhawk" episodes so the schedule would be well ahead when he was drafted in about "3 months." (Cuidera, who invented the character of Chop-Chop in the "Blackhawk" series, was called "Chop" by his fellow artists. His last "Blackhawk" story appeared in August, 1942. If Tex Blaisdell did indeed pencil any of the later episodes as planned, the first of these would have been in *Military* No. 7, according to the dates given in the letters.)

With the same letter, Eisner enclosed a "sheaf of fan mail" requesting autographed pictures of the Spirit. As was the custom, work of this type was given to an assistant. "As soon as Gill [Fox] has forged my signature and given my howling public what they crave, send the stuff back to me," was Will's request, so it seems that Fox was in the habit of tracing Eisner originals and signing Will's name as a matter of routine.

The replacement of Nick Viscardi by Nordling was arranged by January 20, as a note to Will from Busy asked, "Is everything set on Nordling and when does he start work?" In the same letter, Arnold called attention to fan mail "typical of complaints I am getting from many kids about having Gramps, Slick and Del apparently killed off in 'Death Patrol.' " The postcard, from a Donald Wood of Muncie, Indiana, was short and to the point:

"Mr. Arnold, I am not telling you how to run your business, but just wish to give you some suggestions. It's about 'Death Patrol.' Why not bring the old one back? I mean Gramps, Slick and Del. Find them in a concentration camp or something. It would help the comic. I liked it when it 1st came out. Please try to find them."

Whatever the outcome of this suggestion, the strength with which Arnold passed it along implies that he felt it should be implemented.

As 1942 grew older, Arnold became increasingly preoccupied with having his artists get ahead on their deadlines in case they should be drafted. A selection of excerpts from letters he sent to Eisner in the early part of the year display his mounting concern.

[January 17, 1942] "Have Alex [Kotzky] finish off 'Espionage' and get Fred Kider [Kida] started on 'Phantom Clipper.' And keep the needle in Klaus [Nordling] for 'Bob and Swab,' 'Kid Dixon' and 'Shot & Shell' in that order."

[January 26, 1942] (Apparently Arnold was in such a hurry to get the work mentioned above that he picked up Kotzky's "Espionage" job before it was finished). "The six pages of 'Espionage' for *Smash Comics* which I picked up last week weren't completed. We had to do the lettering, heading and general clean up here. This was an awful set of 'Espionage' so try to have Kotzky do a better job next month. The breakdown on this set was horrible and Kotzky didn't have the lead figure look at all like Black X. The story was pretty sad and Batu wasn't even in this episode. . ."

[February 10, 1942] "I hope you now have George Tuska working free lance on a couple of installments of 'Uncle Sam' for *Quarterly* No. 3. . .You now have Cuidera about two episodes ahead on 'Blackhawk' as well as an extra cover for *Military Comics*. Better have Cuidera do a

couple of more covers right away. . .

"I have notified Jerry [Iger] that I am getting all material direct from Nordling in the future, paying him at the rate of $15 per page. . .

"In closing, may I urge you to caution Bob Powell about working too much anti-Nazi stuff into 'Mr. Mystic.' He had Mr. Mystic working as a British agent against the Axis in the last four pages of this feature."

[February 20, 1942] "I am enclosing check for $866 which covers the material for the June issue of *Military Comics* with the exception of the nine pages which we purchased direct from Alden McWilliams. I notice that you paid Ed Cronin $17 per page for 'X of the Underground.' You should have your head examined since this material certainly isn't worth any $17 per page."

[February 24, 1942] "On the set of 'Phantom Clipper' for the June issue of *Military Comics*, Fred Kider [Kida] made his lettering far too large. Please have him reduce this on the next installment. Also, have Fred center his text better, especially in the panels. And please get Nitkin [Nathaniel Nitkin, a scripter for Fox, Hillman, Gleason and Fawcett, not previously credited with work for Quality Comics Group] to write better stories for 'Phantom Clipper.' The last was too windy in the balloons."

[February 27, 1942] "What do you plan to do for issue No. 4 of *Uncle Sam Quarterly*? Will you figure out the make-up of this book and have Nitkin and Bob Powell write the stories?. . .Have [Alex Kotzky] work on 'Espionage' as I will also need this P.D.Q. Am arranging for [Jim] Mooney to take over 'Manhunter' but you might ask Alex if he would like to keep 'Espionage' and free lance it in his spare time. I could ask Miss [Toni] Blum to write the stories with rough break downs for him. . .Don't you think that in a couple more weeks we might have 'Lady Luck' by Klaus Nordling and leave off the Ford Davis?" [This last sentence refers to the fact that from its inception, "Lady Luck" had been credited to the house name of Ford Davis, even though scripts were by Eisner, Dick French, Toni Blum and Nick Viscardi, and artwork had been by Chuck Mazoujian and Viscardi. Arnold liked Nordling's work—and him, personally—so once Klaus took over the feature, the house name tradition was broken].

[March 2, 1942] "In figuring out the material for *Uncle Sam Quarterly* No. 3, please don't forget that Alden McWilliams has done a six page feature called 'Heroic Exploits of the War'. . ."

[March 6, 1942] "Since Tex is going to try and take over 'The Sniper,' I will only turn over 'X of the Underground' to Jerry [Robinson] on the next issue. Try and get [Dave] Berg to continue handling 'Death Patrol'. . .his style is rather unusual and it seems to be fairly popular. Don't bother to get stories from Nitkin for the next installment of 'Secret War News' since Alden McWilliams claims he can handle [writing] these stories all right without any trouble. Tell Alex to turn out the next six pages of 'Espionage.' I am giving 'Manhunter' to Jim Mooney and will get stories for 'Espionage' from Miss Blum in the future so that Alex can do the job on a free lance basis. . .Get Tuska to finish up *Uncle Sam Quarterly*. . .Kida should be working on 'Phantom Clipper' as he is plenty slow."

Eisner's induction was set for May 5. He planned to disband the Tudor City studio in late March and temporarily set up shop at Arnold's Stamford studio. While there he would help Arnold's staff make the transition to ghosting *The Spirit* and arrange for others to take over his editorial duties. Busy's March 19 letter to Will discussed their plans for the transition period.

"If [Alex Kotzky] hasn't ['Espionage'] practically completed now, couldn't he take it home and work on it over the weekend? After this set of 'Espionage,' I will have Miss Blum write the stories with rough breakdowns for Alex. He can then handle 'Espionage' on a free lance basis and if he can find the time to do another feature, I will let him free lance this also. However, I think that Alex will have plenty to do helping Lou Fine get out the eight pages of *The Spirit* each week without trying to double up and handle 'Blackhawk' at the same time. [Kotzky alternated with John Belfi as Lou's inker on the weekly *Spirit* until he was drafted in 1943.] I think I will get Miss Blum or Bob [Powell] to write 'Blackhawk' stories and let Reed Crandall do the art work. He is really doing a swell job on 'The Doll Man' and I am sure that he can do an especially good one on 'Blackhawk.'

"Please put the 'needle' on Klaus Nordling and have him finish up 'Bob and Swab' just as soon as possible, then start working immediately on 'Kid Dixon' and 'Shot and Shell.' Klaus has put me in a hole and he should start making up for lost time while his family is still away. Will you please give him a 'pep talk?'

"I don't think that the set of *Spirit* [dailies] which Lou did in the small size was too hot. A couple of the shots of Dolan are pretty futuristic and I think we might paste over a few spots when you come to Stamford.

"I have room for about six of your drawing tables together with a few chairs and tabourets, as well as your old filing cabinet. But I can't do anything about the couch or desk so you had better plan to get rid of [them].

"I started Jack Cole on a set of 'Midnight' and I am trying to get him just as far ahead as possible on his various comic magazines material so that he can devote most of his time to the daily [*Spirit*] strip during the next few weeks. Personally, I think that when you get to Stamford, it might be well for you to let us use one of Lou's sets of *The Spirit* for the weekly and take a week to do nothing but daily strips in order to finish up definitely on these. Then Jack can take over the daily strips and you can concentrate on weekly material as well as stories and layouts for Lou."

The mention of Jack Cole's "Midnight" character refers to Arnold's plan to create an imitation of *The Spirit* so that if Will were to die in the war, a substitute could be produced. "Midnight" looked almost exactly like *The Spirit*, but his adventures were—in keeping with Jack Cole's style—more humourous.

As far as the syndicate was concerned, Eisner reassured them that although he was moving and would soon join the Army, "the men I leave behind are very capable, having worked with me for a long time. . .I'm planning on laying out the skeleton of daily adventures that should stretch well into the Autumn. . ."

Henry Martin replied that he was "particularly happy" that Eisner was plotting the dailies well in advance, and reminded him to simplify his art and eliminate "fancy angles" on the dailies because all Register and Tribune strips were to be reduced in size on April 17. In order to save newsprint for the war effort, comic strips were to run only in four or five column widths. The standard six column width would vanish forever. Many comic strip fans date the end of the Golden Age of strips from this point. However, with the size strips run today for comparison, the 1940s, if not Golden, was at least an untarnished Silver Age.

On March 30, 1942, Eisner sent letters to his entire staff of freelancers, informing them of his new address, and arranging new deadlines and delivery methods for them. Excerpts from a few of these notes clarify who was working on the various features at the time.

To Harry Sussman, a writer for Hillman and Novelty, not previously credited with working for Quality: "I am planning to accept at least one story of the many you have submitted. The one I refer to is the story of a goofy scientist—the man who could do everything—who has the gadgets that can tie Uncle Sam down with wires, etc. Suppose you figure on 12 pages in length, that is including the lead page—making a breakdown (page by page) and get the work to me here some way. . ."

To Fred Kida: "I expect you will be finished with your 'Phantom Clipper' on Wednesday. So if you cannot get up here . . .please wrap it securely and drop it at Eisner & Iger, Ltd. 202 E. 44th St., 7th floor, in either Mr. Arnold's name or my name. . ."

To David Berg: "I would like you to start on another 'Death Patrol' at once. You needn't bother submitting the story [plot and script] for my approval, as I think you are quite capable of doing it yourself by now. Just remember to keep your inking clean and your story slightly humorous. NO DEAD HEROES. We can handle the lettering up here so com-

plete the job up to the balloons and leave plenty of space for them. . ."

To Bob Powell: "Will you please bring your 'Mr. Mystic' up here on Wednesday at which time I will discuss future stories and some new business I have for you." [The new business was to be Powell's opportunity to try out as a ghost scripter for *The Spirit*—about which, more later].

To Tex Blaisdell: "Please get the two-page story up here immediately, if not sooner." [This story was probably an installment of a two-page feature entitled 'Diary of a Draftee,' which ran in *Military Comics*].

To Al Jaffee: "I am in the market again for a two-page 'Inferior Man' and one a month thereafter. Keep the stories [plots and scripts] simple and complete in themselves—like the old 'Archie O'Toole.' Keep it around the Army or Navy and have your inking simple. Mail me a set just as soon as you have it finished. . .A check will follow on wings."

To Toni Blum: "As I informed your father [Alex Blum, an artist in the Iger shop], I am now permanently in Stamford. Would it be possible for you to get up here some time this week so that we might discuss *Spirit* stories and some other story work which I would like you to do for me? I don't think we could handle this by mail, so if you cannot possibly get up to Stamford, let me know when we can meet somewhere in New York."

The replies to Eisner's mass mailing were mostly business-related, but they are interesting for the light they cast on how freelancers operated in those days.

Tex Blaisdell replied by return mail that he not only had turned in his two page feature, he also had sent an "illustration" for a text page. He mentioned that he would be inducted in two weeks. Eisner found the art in a stack of stuff in the office and apologized at once for thinking Blaisdell was late.

Fred Kida, unable to go to Stamford, left his 'Phantom Clipper' pages at Eisner & Iger's and dropped a note to Will in which he referred to "2 new characters" in the series and mentioned that he "left the colored 'guy' out as two new characters seem to take care of the humor. . .or do they?" He closed with sincere appreciation to both Eisner and Arnold and signed it with a self-portrait. Kida, about 21 at the time, was just beginning his career. In a short while he would join Ed Cronin at Hillman Periodicals, where he would produce "Airboy," one of the nicest looking aviation features ever to appear in comics.

The innocent post card from Donald Wood in Muncie regarding the "Death Patrol" bore fruit in a March 31, 1942 letter from Eisner to Dave Berg. Eisner's comments incorporated Wood's suggestion about the fate of three characters, as well as supplying Berg with specific instructions about pacing a comic book story:

"I have just read through four months of 'Death Patrol' and I find the stories in general pretty corny. Apparently you are trying for too much 'effect.' I suggest that you keep to a simple direct narrative type of story. Don't get another person to tell a story in flashback form as you only have a few pages to complete the thing. And that type of story needs at least two or three pages for build-up.

"As for characters, I not only suggest but insist that you bring the old cannibal king back, get rid of his son, bring the cowboy back and eliminate the girl. Bring Gramps back and get rid of the gaucho. Please keep away from the Eisner-type of sadistic humor. One black sheep in the family is enough. Keep making fools of the Nazis and continue to play up the individuals. It might not be a bad idea to feature Del and one or two lieutenants in a story with the rest of the characters as a general build up each month, the same as we do with 'Blackhawk.'

"I am convinced that you are trying to put too much in a five page story. I am very anxious for you to really try hard on this next job because we may make *Military Comics* a monthly again in the Autumn. I think 'Death Patrol' is a very worthwhile feature deserving of a better fate than you have been handing out to it.

"Please get your story in soon."

Al Jaffee's response to Eisner's letter about "Inferior Man" was a postcard showing a military officer, clothed on the front of the card, but stripped to his shorts and t-shirt on the reverse. "I received your letter and will follow your instructions. Please expect two pages within this week," was all he said.

Fred Guardineer, a Quality Group artist who would take over Bob Powell's "Mr. Mystic" when Powell was drafted, wrote a letter to Eisner around this time, too. In addition to their professional relationship, the two men shared a mutual interest in hunting.

"I'll be looking forward to slaughtering decoys with you after you bury Hitler, resume business, and are sufficiently behind with 'The Spirit' to grab your double-barrel special over and under trigger rapid fire Hemingway and accompany me into the ghoul-haunted woodlands of Long Island," said Guardineer. "P.S. That really is a swell gun and between you, me, and my draft board, they are sharpening up the axes for the married men. Be seeing you." (Guardineer's interest in hunting and the outdoors probably came to its fullest expression later on in his career, when he wrote and drew a regular column on the subjects for a Long Island newspaper. Even in his "Mr. Mystic" stories—which he wrote—he tried to give the sorcerer-hero adventures involving fishing, hunting and camping).

Fred Kida got another letter from Will on April 3. Thanking him for turning in the "Phantom Clipper" ("a fairly good job"), Eisner also took the time to give Kida some advice on his art: "It might be a good idea. . .to simplify your treatments, using plenty of blacks, and clean out faces." Since Kida acknowledges today that his strongest early influence was Milton Caniff, he certainly found it easy to follow Eisner's advice about "plenty of blacks," although in later years, when he went to work for Lev Gleason, he was forced by Gleason's "house art" style to drop his characteristic spotting of blacks in favour of an "open" line style, which he retains to this day.

On April 3, Eisner returned a batch of rejected scripts to Nat Nitkin ("so that you will have a record of these ideas"). He told Nitkin that in the future, he would supply specific plot ideas so Nitkin would have a "Particular subject in mind before we begin the next 'Secret War News'." Whether this editorial plotting policy was enforced after Eisner entered the Army is unknown—the entire letter may have been meant as a polite brush-off of Nitkin. Since writers' credits are the hardest of all to establish, it cannot be said with any certainty whether or not Nathaniel Nitkin continued to script for Quality Comics after this date.

During his last month as a civilian, Eisner tried to set in order as many of his relationships with freelancers and other suppliers as possible, so that work would continue to be produced according to schedule. Thus began a rapid-fire series of interchanges with Jerry Iger, Toni Blum (who was being groomed to script the weekly *Spirit* stories), and Bob Powell, who was invited to submit *Spirit* stories in addition to his regular "Mr. Mystic" work. A few excerpts from those letters:

[April 3, 1942, to Jerry Iger] "I. . . looked over 'X of the Underground.' On the level, this stuff is almost as bad as the work done on this unfortunate feature heretofore. Busy may be a little more lenient in purchasing B material than I, for after all, he has many more books than I have.

"I wonder if you would oblige me and get a new man on the next 'X of the Underground.' I am thinking of Arthur Peddy. Busy tells me that Peddy has plenty of time for free lance work and since I am paying you $15 per page, which is more than Scotty [T.T. Scott] or Al Harvey will pay you, I believe you can afford to put this man on it. As for the story, it is a factory job and I am sure your men can do better.

"I would like to repeat that I am one of the boys and I think I know good stuff when I see it. . .and I don't see it in 'X of the Underground'. . ."

[April 4, 1942, Iger to Eisner] "While I don't agree with you that the feature 'X of the Underground' is bad, I'll put another man on it. Perhaps Peddy. The artist who did this feature draws 'Kid Patrol' and I think he's damn good. What in 'ell has come over you? Making cracks about 'B' features and 'being one of the boys' and 'factory jobs.' As far as this office is concerned, we consider all features important.

"If you don't think I can handle this feature to your satisfactions, then perhaps you'd better forget it."

[April 6, 1942, Eisner to Iger] "Come, come, come, Mr. Iger, since when did I have to pull punches with you and kowtow or even worry about super-sensitive feelings with you. I thought at least to YOU I could speak my mind (what there is of it).

"As for the quality of that feature, Busy agrees with me that it wasn't the best I could have gotten for the money. In fact, he doubts whether it was done by the 'Kid Patrol' artist. [The name of this particular artist is unknown, but may have been Lee J. Ames, a.k.a. Lee Abromovitz, according to comics researcher Henry Steele]. Be that as it may, I am glad you can give me Peddy on that feature.

"Believe me, Jerry, it is very important to me to have *Military Comics* the best published work I could turn out. For I am not selling pages—I make my money as, if, and when the public buys the magazine. So if I am a little crank about that, please understand.

"Re: your last paragraph—I DO think you can handle this feature to my satisfaction and I have no intention of forgetting it."

Of all the many letters Eisner wrote in the period covered by these files, the above is the only one which did not close with the words, "Cordially" or "Cordially yours." My guess is that Busy Arnold's secretary took the letter in dictation, did not know that Eisner always ended with the word "Cordially," and so closed with the more conventional "Sincerely yours" used by Arnold.

Jerry Iger caught the change, and commented obliquely on it while continuing the rather heated exchange which had built over the identity of the "Kid Patrol" artist. That Iger wished to keep the name of the artist a secret is evident. Iger made his income as a packager, taking a per-page commission on all work he placed with the various publishers. It appears that the artist was not under contract and Iger didn't want another shop to steal him by offering him more money.

[April 6, 1942, Iger to Eisner] "This is a letter to end all letters, except cordial ones! Is it a deal? Must I send you an affidavit or get a Philadelphia lawyer to convince you that 'X of the Underground' was done by the artist who does 'Kid Patrol'!

"It is also vital to me that all features leaving this office produce readers, for obvious reasons.

"I said I MAY put Peddy on the job. At any rate, the man I will have handle it should please you (I hope!)"

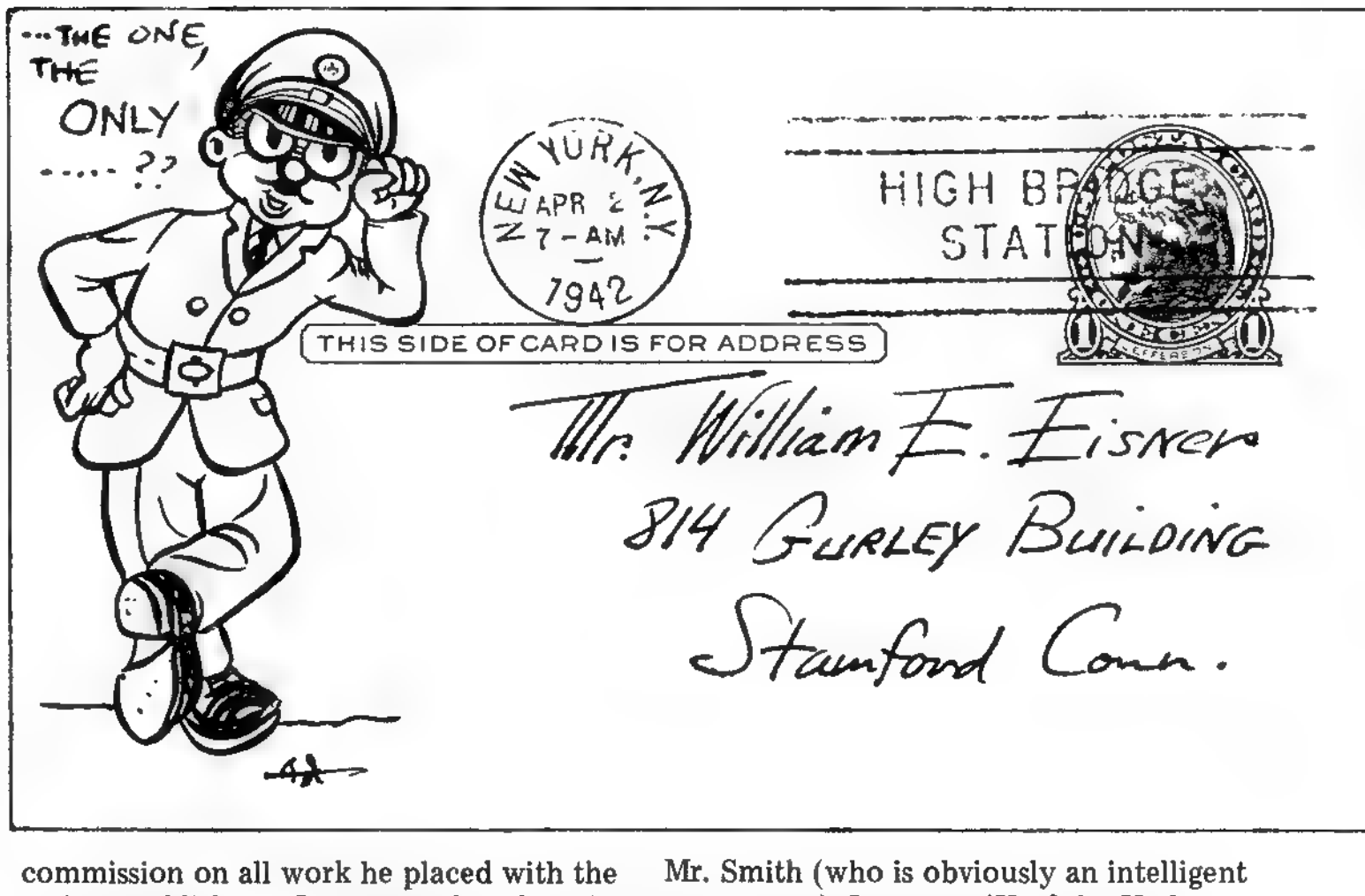
[April 8, 1942, Eisner to Iger] "It was nice to see you again despite our 'hot' correspondence which I think has cooled off and will be very placid in the future. I liked the artist you proposed for 'X of the Underground' and after talking to Mr. Smith (who is obviously an intelligent young man), I am sure 'X of the Underground' now has a happy future."

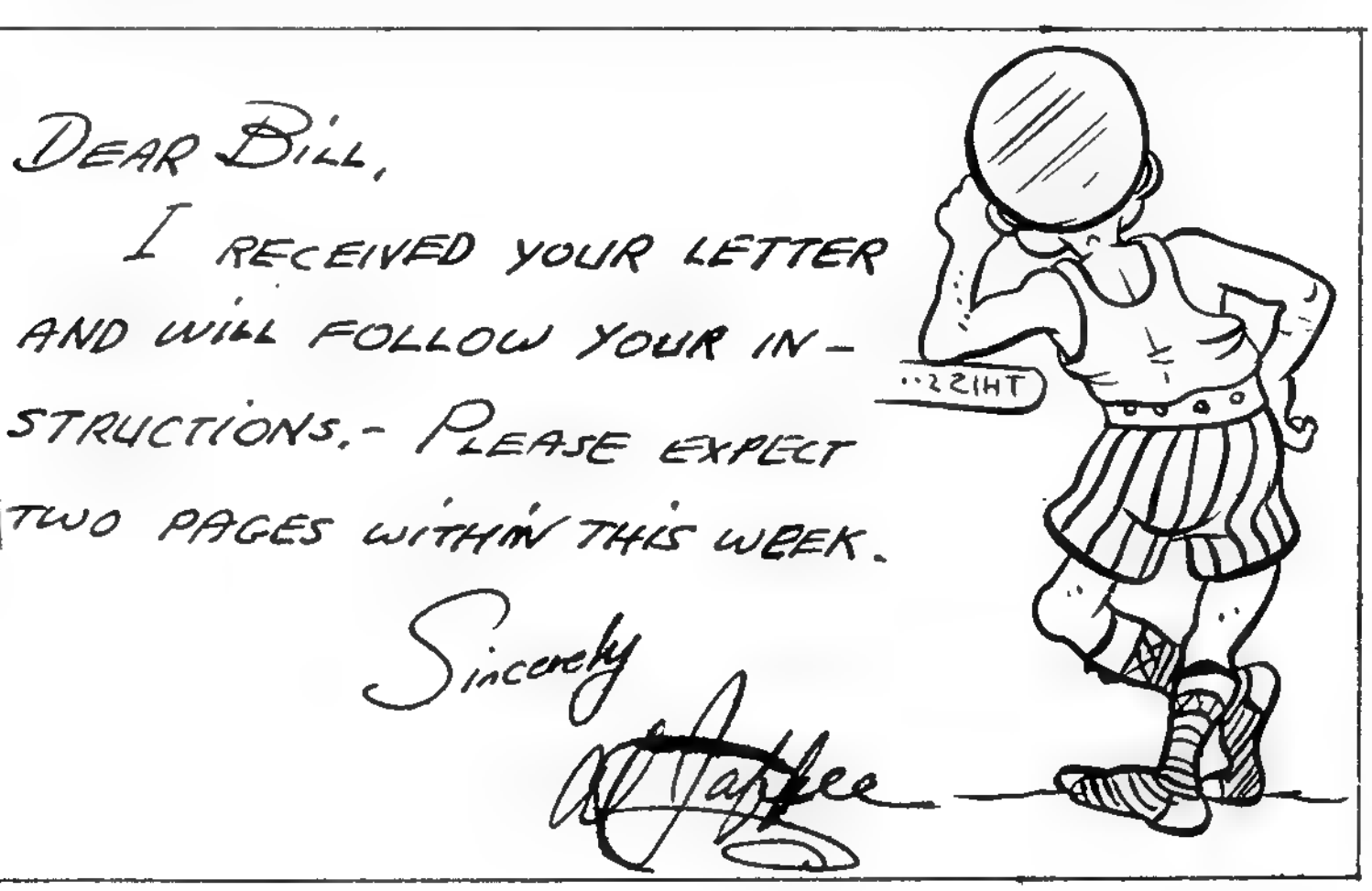
Apparently, Eisner and Iger met, and Eisner was introduced to an artist, not Peddy, and agreed to let him draw the feature. "Smith" may have been his name, but I doubt it. I think Eisner was using the name generically, as one might use the name "John Doe." In any case, he cannot have meant Bill Smith, who already drew features such as "Yankee Eagle" for Quality, because Eisner knew Bill Smith and they were the same age, precluding Will's calling him a "young man." There were and are many men named Smith who have worked in comics, but no Golden Age era Smiths seem to exactly fit the bill here, as some were "funny" cartoonists, and others were writers.

Eisner's letter continues: "On arrival in Stamford, I found that Busy had ordered a story from a writer and told George Tuska that he could handle 'The Sniper' on a free lance basis, thus obligating us. However, I have asked him to turn over 'The Unknown' to [your shop. It] is a five page feature in *National Comics* that has the same basic requirements as 'The Sniper.' As a matter of fact, Bernard Klein began both 'The Sniper' and 'The Unknown' . . ." Klein also drew such features as "Green Arrow" and "Dr. Fate" for National (now DC) comics in the early 1940s. He died in the mid-'40s.

With the resolution of his problems with Iger, Will turned to the problem of finding ghost writers for *The Spirit.* He was trying to get far ahead on the weekly stories before his induction. In order to produce enough layouts to keep Lou Fine in work until Autumn, he also wished to buy scripts he could rewrite and rough pencil.

Toni Blum, a longtime associate, whose writing style was similar to his, was his first choice. Toni had already taken over




DEAR BILL,
I RECEIVED YOUR LETTER AND WILL FOLLOW YOUR IN-STRUCTIONS.- PLEASE EXPECT TWO PAGES WITHIN THIS WEEK.
SINCERELY
..22IHT

scripting on many of the features Eisner had created, such as "The Ray," "The Black Condor," and "Doll Man." As noted earlier, she was responsible for scripting entire issues of Quality comics produced in the Iger shop. She was capable of producing rough layouts herself, as she was instructed to do for Alex Kotzky on the "Espionage" feature. Iger was not eager to lose his most prolific scripter, and it seems that Blum herself was not anxious to give up her security at the Iger shop just for the chance to write *Spirit* stories.

What followed was a series of monetary negotiations which did not go smoothly.

Bob Powell, on the other hand, was a scripter who was quite willing to ghost-write *The Spirit.* Powell already scripted his own "Mr. Mystic" episodes, as well as the short fillers like "Loops and Banks" which he drew for Quality Comics. He wanted very much to sell *Spirit* scripts to Eisner, and the question of money doesn't seem to have bothered him. In his case,

Fred Kida self-portrait (1942)

the problem was that Will didn't like his stories and kept sending them back for rewrites.

Here are excerpts from letters of April, 1942, that passed between Eisner, Blum, and Powell on the subject of *Spirit* ghost work:

[April 13, 1942, Eisner to Blum] "After you left on Saturday, I discussed the matter of price with Busy and after we figured our costs, which include Lou's salary, the lettering man's salary and an asistant for Lou (who, as you know, is not very fast), we found that the request of $75 you made was more than we could meet at this time. All we could manage to pay for *The Spirit* stories is $30 per script.

"Please understand that the latter figure is not an evaluation of your ability but merely a mathematical calculation and if you cannot see your way clear to do stuff for *The Spirit* with equal interest at that figure, we shall have to get along without your work—a situation which would leave me very, very unhappy.

"While this is not in effect a counter-offer, I sincerely hope that you can figure some way of doing *The Spirit* at the $30 rate. I, on my part, would be willing to cooperate in any way you may think of; such as additional comic book work or anything else that I could reasonably do. If you should decide to work with me on this basis, I would appreciate hearing from you before Wednesday morning and we will get together with our contemplated rendezvous."

[April, undated, 1942, Powell to Eisner and Arnold] "Hey! Have a heart. Ruling in the spaces for the lettering and inking in the balloons will take me a whole day to do. That's some job.

"I realize your office staff is up to its neck now in work, what with Bill leaving and all, and I don't mind helping out by doing as you request for a couple of weeks, but I hope. . .it can be taken off my hands. That stuff takes up too much time.

"I sent up a 'Blackhawk' story along with a couple of Bill's *Spirits.* What did you think of it? It's the plot we discussed in your office last Wednesday. I transferred the capture of the aircraft carrier over from the first *Spirit. . .*" (The "first *Spirit*" seems to be a story Powell tried to sell Eisner for the weekly section. When Will rejected it, Powell rewrote it as a "Blackhawk" episode. Whether or not it was ever used is not known to me, but perhaps a "Blackhawk" collector could identify it and thus assure that Powell gets a scripting credit.)

[April 13, 1942, Eisner to Powell] "Please sit down—I am going to wade through your stuff.

"I read the letter you sent to Busy which refers to the inking of balloons. . . I believe he is entirely justified in asking you to ink in [around] your balloons, because as you know, after Tony [DiPreta?] has completed the lettering and balloons, there is always an area of unfinished drawing around the copy that has to be completed. . .

"Now for the *Spirit* story. (I refer to the old men). I think you have something here and if you break it down as well as I believe you can, I am sure we will have a 'whopper.' I think the old men should be identical twins. Their entrance into the story, however, is old stuff. You should perhaps have them carry Dolan in where the Spirit is waiting. As usual, you have the Spirit enter the story in a much too commonplace manner—a tie-up of some sort is absolutely important. Your gag stuff is swell and I think all you really need is a good solid nucleus or reason why all this happens.

"I hope this story isn't too close to any plot in *Colliers* or the *Saturday Evening Post* because our readers read those magazines and see the same movies as we do. Go right ahead and break down this story. I am buying it, heaven help me.

"As for the yo-yo fiasco. . .I am afraid . . .there is something missing in this plot—let's drop it and use it for something else.

"I am keeping the 'Blackhawk' story because there is a lot of work to be done on it and we have other things more pressing right now.

"Hope to see you and Flo very soon."

The "old men" or "twins" story referred to above never appeared as a *Spirit* episode, although many years later, Eisner did use a couple of similar plots involving twins—one of which was written by Klaus Nordling. The "yo-yo fiasco" was evidently a previously rejected *Spirit* story, and it too never saw print in any identifiable form. The woman named "Flo" was Powell's wife, Florence.

[April, undated, 1942, Blum to Eisner] "Alright, so I was a little 'high' when I asked $75. You can't blame me. But I do think you should have arranged your budget to allow for more funds for the story, which, you have repeatedly admitted, is important.

"You see, Bill, it isn't that I'm such a mercenary wench, but to me, my time is worth precious dollars. I had expected to devote at least four or five days to *The Spirit,* or more, to do research, to rehash, to work up breakdowns, etc. At $30, it's hardly worth it as I can make that in two or three days on a nine-page feature. I am trying desperately to do some 'good work' and I'll sacrifice the money to it.

"If I were only paid thirty for *The Spirit,* I would have to do more comic strips to make it pay, and still put a lot of work on the eight weekly pages because not only you have to be pleased, an impossibility, but all your editors on all your papers.

"Perhaps a fairer price would be $50. Or $45 with a guarantee of a couple of short features a month to supplement the difference. I think I could get along on that.

"If you cannot see your way clear to pay this, I would rather continue my work for Mr. Arnold as previously without the additional responsibility of *The Spirit.*

"Hoping we can get together on this, I await your answer, Wednesday.

"P.S. Please ask Mr. Arnold if 'the beautiful woman, the dwarf and the giant' are still active in 'Manhunter,' and if so, who are they?" [This refers to the "Manhunter" stories Blum was commissioned to script and prepare breakdowns for Alex Kotzky.)

[April 16, 1942, Eisner to Blum] "I want to thank you for your consideration in reducing your price for *The Spirit.* I think that the best plan for both of us would be for you to continue doing your comic book work and treat *The Spirit* as nothing but another comic book feature, except that a higher standard is set.

"Under this plan you [would work] at the comic book rate, raising the price as the quality of the stories demanded. Please let me know if this is agreeable to you and how often we may expect *The Spirit* stories.

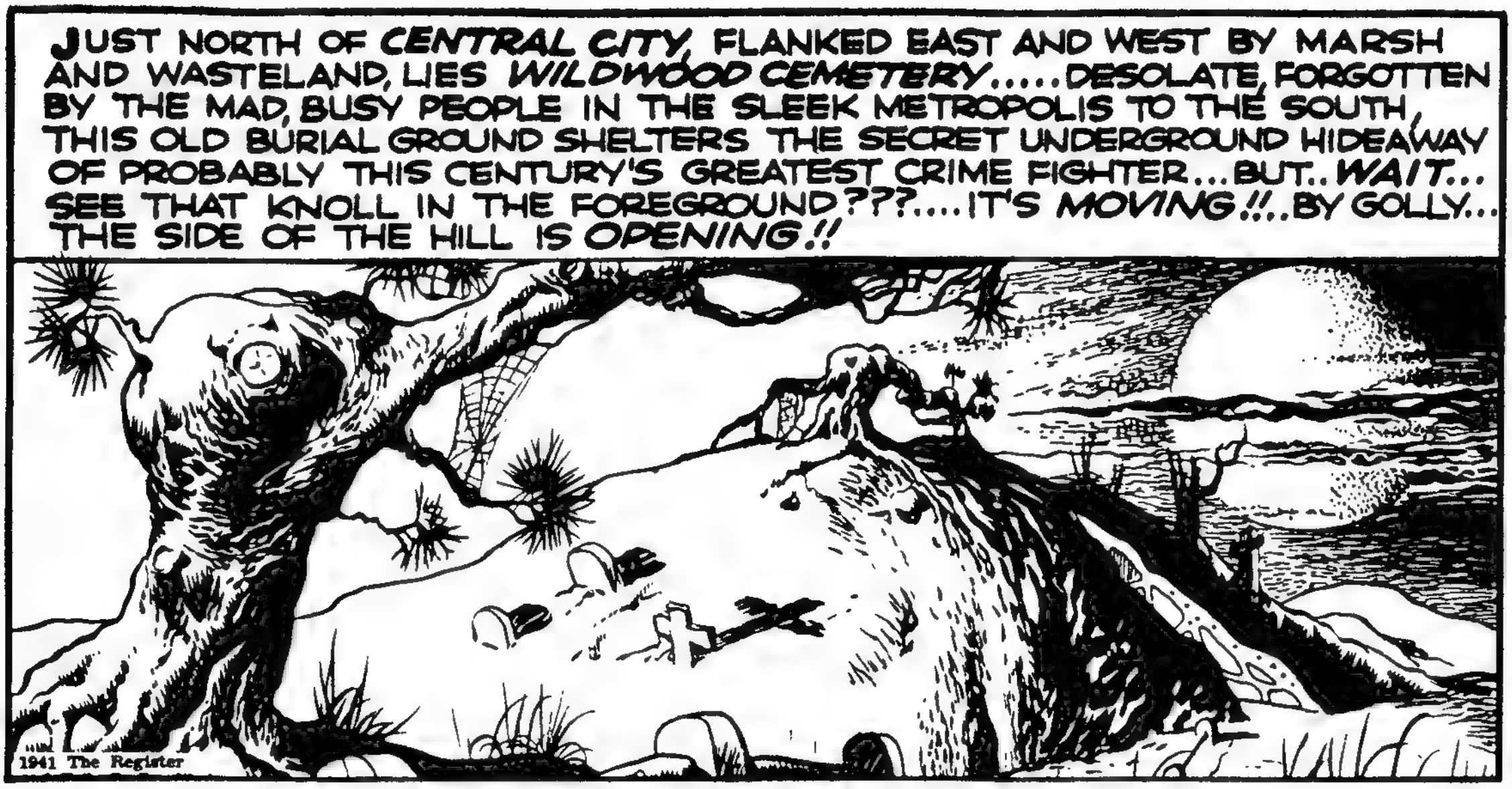
continued on page 56...

THE SPIRIT

* DENOTES DAILY STRIP WHICH HAS NEVER BEEN REPRINTED

A MODERN CRIME WARRIOR P

* THE SPIRIT


JUST NORTH OF CENTRAL CITY, FLANKED EAST AND WEST BY MARSH AND WASTELAND, LIES WILDWOOD CEMETERY.....DESOLATE, FORGOTTEN BY THE MAD, BUSY PEOPLE IN THE SLEEK METROPOLIS TO THE SOUTH, THIS OLD BURIAL GROUND SHELTERS THE SECRET UNDERGROUND HIDEAWAY OF PROBABLY THIS CENTURY'S GREATEST CRIME FIGHTER...BUT..WAIT... SEE THAT KNOLL IN THE FOREGROUND???....IT'S MOVING!!..BY GOLLY... THE SIDE OF THE HILL IS OPENING!!
1941 The Register

NOW the famous hero of 3 million newspaper comic books makes his bow in a daily newspaper strip!

PROVES CRIME DOES NOT PAY!

By WILL EISNER

SMOOTHLY, A POWERFUL ROADSTER ROLLS FROM THE REVEALED HANGAR....
...A BRIEF RUN..AND WINGS TELESCOPE OUT!!...THE HOOD ROLLS BACK AND A PROPELLER NOW FLASHES FORTH AS THE AUTOPLANE ZOOMS INTO THE NIGHT SKY!!
...WHILE AT THE WHEEL SITS A MASKED MAN!!..THE 20TH CENTURY ROBIN HOOD....THE SPIRIT!!

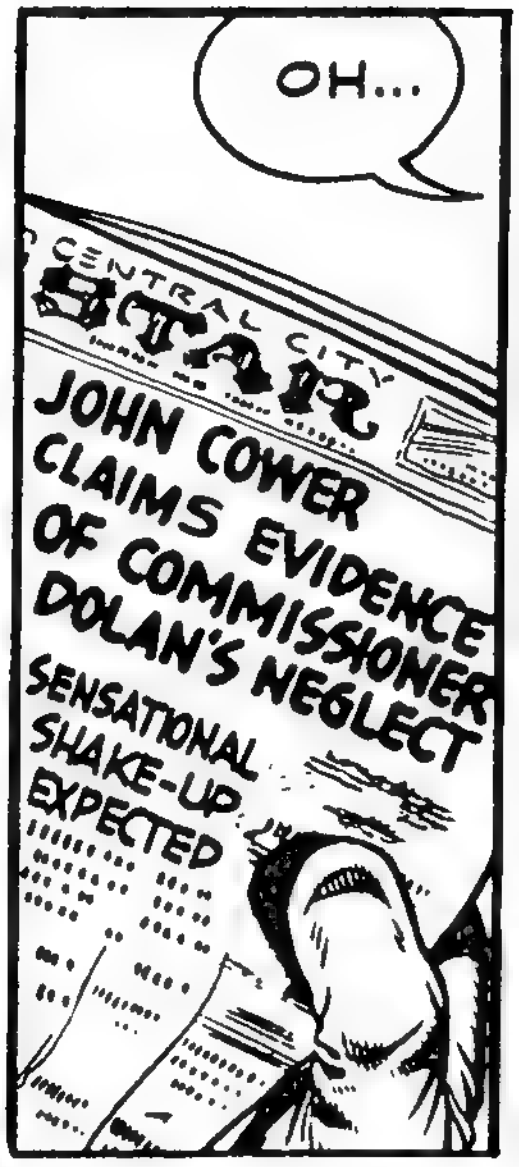
THE SPIRIT

IT WOULD THOROUGHLY FRIGHTEN YOU GOOD CITIZENS TO REALLY KNOW WHAT THINGS GO ON BENEATH THE SILENCE IN CENTRAL CITY AFTER DARK....FOR INSTANCE.....

We present here the first 19 daily *Spirit* strips as written and drawn by Will Eisner and distributed by the Register and Tribune Syndicate in 1941. Because 10 of these strips have never been reprinted before (they are denoted by asterisks), and in one case were printed out of order, we decided to devote this space in the *Quarterly* to them.

THE SPIRIT

DOLAN...DOLAN...TELL ME YOU DIDN'T KILL HIM...GOOD GODFREY, MAN...TALK!!... IT WAS SELF DEFENSE...YOU WRESTED THE GUN OUT OF HIS HAND AND....
NO, SPIRIT.. NO... SOMEONE SHOT AT ME IN THE DARK AND I SHOT BACK!
2



By Will Eisner

1941 The Register and Tribune Syndicate
CLICK
COMMISSIONER DOLAN!! GOOD HEAVENS!! YOU'VE KILLED HIM!!
THE SPIRIT!! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?!!

When a daily feature starts, it is customary to number the first few weeks' worth of strips rather than date them. This is done so that papers joining late can get on simultaneous release by selectively editing certain dailies until they catch up. Once the first wave of papers signs on, the strips are dated. New syndicate clients must then join the series in progress,

By Will Eisner

THIS MAN IS COWER--THEY'LL THINK I PLANNED IT
IT'S NOT LIKE YOU TO GIVE UP WITHOUT A FIGHT, DOLAN ...WE'VE GOT ONE ADVANTAGE ...NO ONE SAW US COME IN...
NO ONE...EXCEPT US!!!
1941 The Register

OOHH, DADDY... WHY DID YOU SHOOT COWER? I KNEW SOME-THING BAD WOULD HAPPEN....
GOLLY!!... DE COMMISSIONER DONE SHOT MR. COWER DAID!
3
1941 The Register and Tribune Syndicate

HOW DID YOU TWO GET HERE?! ELLEN.. WHY ARE YOU HERE?
DADDY HAS BEEN ACTING WORRIED OF LATE....TONIGHT HE CALLED COWER AND SAID HE'D BE OVER...I FEARED THE WORST...OHH... WHY...WHY DID YOU KILL HIM, DADDY?

usually after running a short introductory sequence. The first strip in our sequence on page 36 served as this introduction. As a "generic" strip, it was not numbered or dated, and the strip after it started as number one. The daily *Spirit* began dating strips on Dec. 8, 1941. There were 48 numbered dailies released prior to that date, not including the introductory

By WILL EISNER

AND YOU!!.. EBONY WHITE! ...WHY AREN'T YOU IN OUR SECRET HIDEAWAY.... WILDWOOD CEMETERY?
MIST' SPIRIT BOSS...AS YO' CHIEF ASSISTANT AH FEELS IT MAH BOUNDEN DUTY TO ACCOMPANY YO' ON ALL DANGEROUS MISSIONS....
?

strip. Therefore, any run from a paper that contains less than 49 dailies before Dec. 8 is incomplete.

The *New Orleans Times-Picayune* and the *Philadelphia Record* are two examples of papers which should have a complete run of numbered strips.

By WILL EISNER

HERE, EBONY... YOU TAKE HER HOME.... SHE'S TO SEE NO ONE.... AND COMMISSIONER DOLAN AND I WILL REMAIN HERE...
YASSUH, MIST SPIRIT BOSS... AN' EF'N YO' GIT IN REAL DANGER, AH'LL BE READY TO AID YO'!!

1941, The Register and Tribune Syndicate
5
FOR 25 YEARS A CLEAN RECORD ON THE POLICE FORCE...AND NOW, JUST BECAUSE A CHEAP POLITICIAN TRIES TO GET ME OUT OF THE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE, ...THIS--
COMMISSIONER
DOLAN
PRIVATE

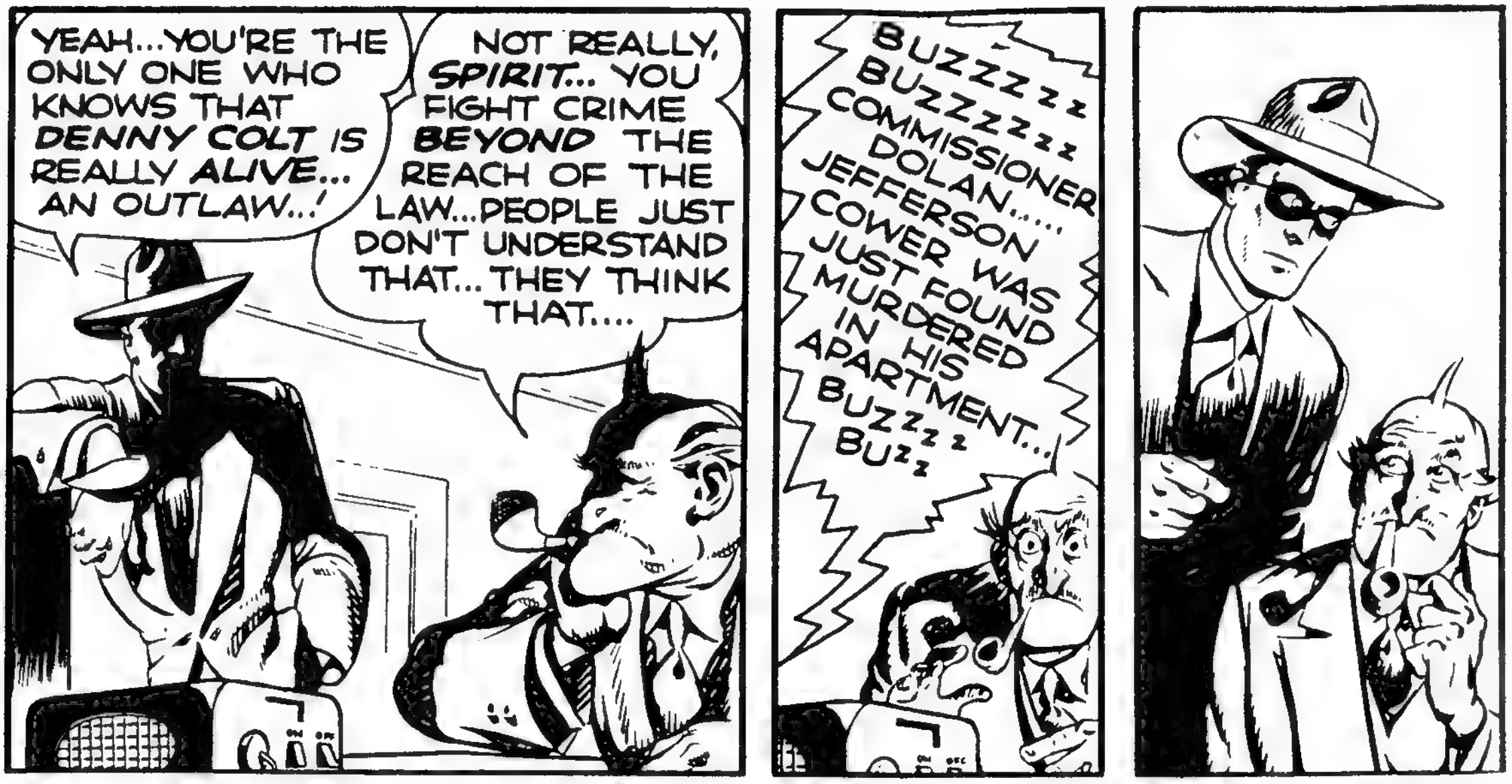
SOMETHING STRANGE ABOUT THIS WHOLE THING!
YOU'VE BEEN A REAL FRIEND TO ME, SPIRIT... EVER SINCE YOU WERE BURIED BY MISTAKE AND BECAME THE SPIRIT, WE'VE STOOD BY EACH OTHER EVEN THOUGH...WE...WE'VE BEEN ON DIFFERENT SIDES OF THE FENCE...

As noted on pages 25 and 26 of this issue, Eisner made some changes in the first strips, at the syndicate's request. In numbered strips one and two, the lettering was changed from "Murdered" to "Killed" and "Kill." In numbered strip three, panel two, the word "Scared" has been changed to "Worried."

* THE SPIRIT

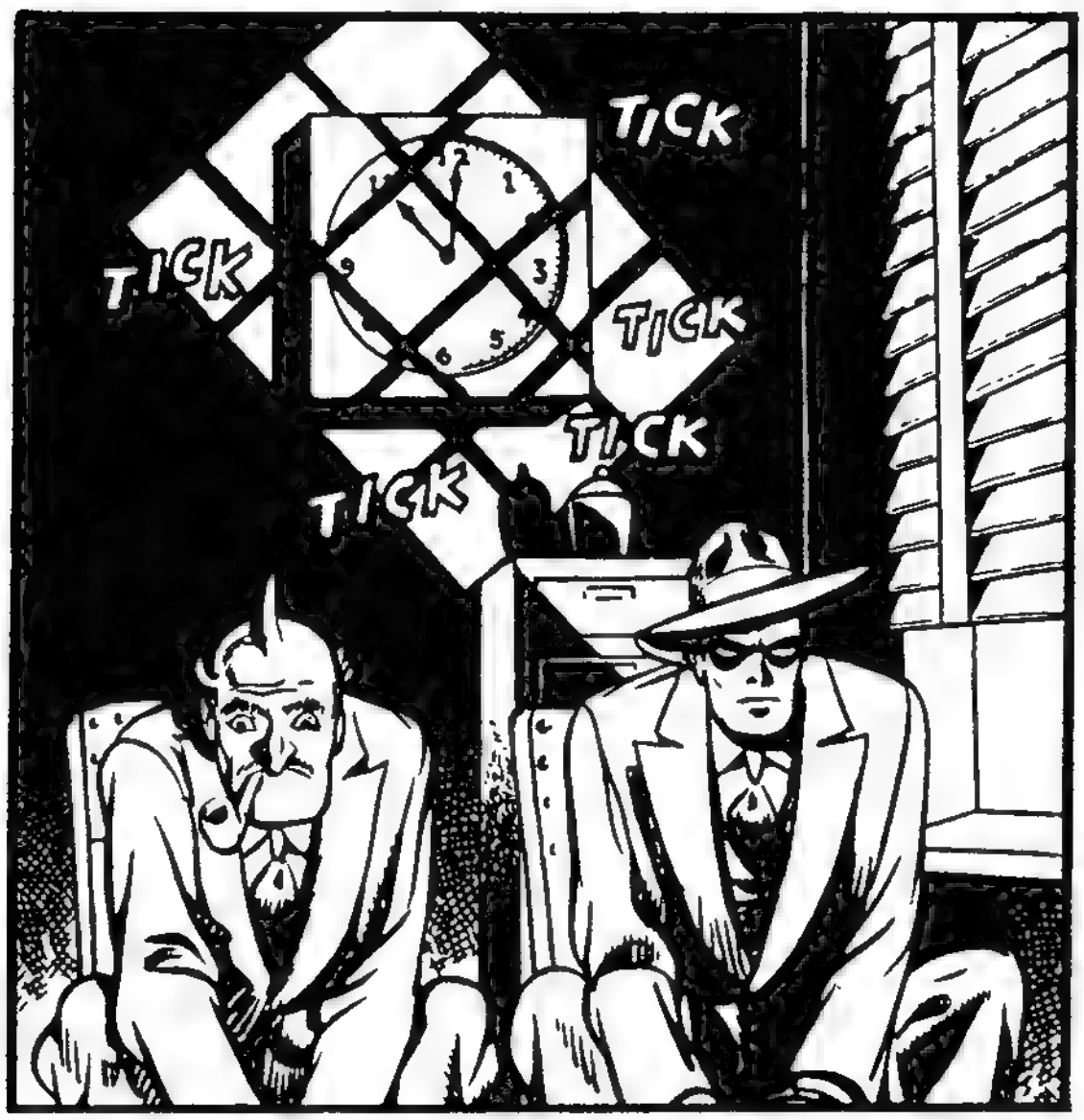
COMMISSIONER DOLAN...WHY DON'T YOU ANSWER... WE ARE STANDING BY.....
GOOD GRAVY!! WHAT'LL I DO, SPIRIT..? I'M THE KILLER... GULP..I'M GOING TO TELL....
NO YOU DON'T. JUST GIVE THE USUAL ORDERS!
6
1941 The Register and Tribune Syndicate

By WILL EISNER


YEAH...YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS THAT DENNY COLT IS REALLY ALIVE... AN OUTLAW...!
NOT REALLY, SPIRIT... YOU FIGHT CRIME BEYOND THE REACH OF THE LAW...PEOPLE JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND THAT... THEY THINK THAT....
BUZZZZZ
BUZZZZZZ
COMMISSIONER DOLAN.....
JEFFERSON COWER WAS JUST FOUND MURDERED IN HIS APARTMENT..!
BUZZZ
BUZZ

In strip 14 (not numbered on our proof sheet), the reader can see how the Spirit got his police uniform disguise. Taking it from a manequin solved the moral question of either taking the uniform by force from an officer of the law, or having a friendly officer giving it to a wanted murderer.

By WILL EISNER



1941, The Register and Tribune Syndicate

7

UNABLE TO WITHHOLD IT ANY LONGER, COMMISSIONER DOLAN, THE *SPIRIT'S* SECRET FRIEND, CALLED MAYOR ALDRICH TO CONFESS TO THE SHOOTING OF JEFF COWER, A POLITICAL ENEMY....

DOLAN!! DOLAN!! YOU FOOL.. YOU'RE PLAYING RIGHT INTO THEIR HANDS!!

IT'S MY DUTY.. I KILLED A MAN.. GULP...

HEY!! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

MY DUTY!!.. YOU STUBBORN OLD GOAT!

In previous reprintings, notably the Ed Aprill and Ken Pierce editions, Squire Sampson's conference with his gang (strip 16) takes place *before* his political rally speech (strip 13). In our reprinting from proof sheets, the strips are in correct order, with the gang conference following the political rally by two strips.

THE SPIRIT

WH.. WHAT'S HAPPENED?.. OOOHH, MY JAW... *HEY!!*.. WHO PUT THIS IN MY.....

???..YOU JUST CAPTURED THE *SPIRIT*... HE'S THE REAL *KILLER*.. WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU, DOLAN?

COMMISSIONER DOLAN

8

...THIS FARCE MUST STOP! MAYOR ALDRICH... I *AM* REALLY THE.....

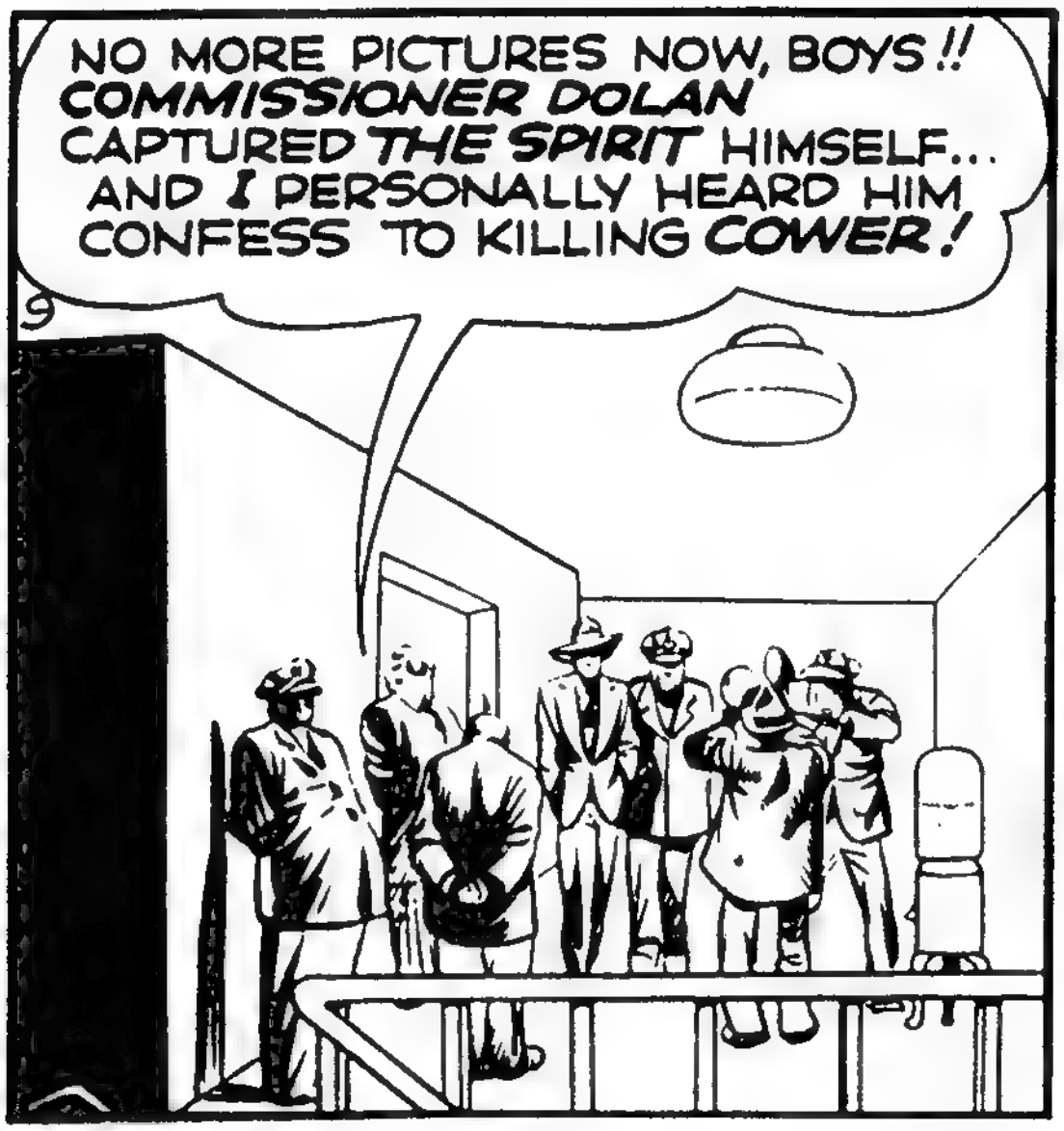
DON'T LISTEN TO HIM, MAYOR... HE'S *PUNCHY*... I SOCKED HIM WHEN HE PULLED A GUN!

By WILL EISNER

YEAH..SO WHAT...?!! BUT IF YOU GUYS THINK YOU'RE GONNA PIN THIS MURDER ON ME... YOU'RE NUTS!!
??? WONDERFUL WORK, DOLAN!..IN LESS THAN AN HOUR AFTER THE SHOOTING, YOU'VE CAPTURED COWER'S KILLER!

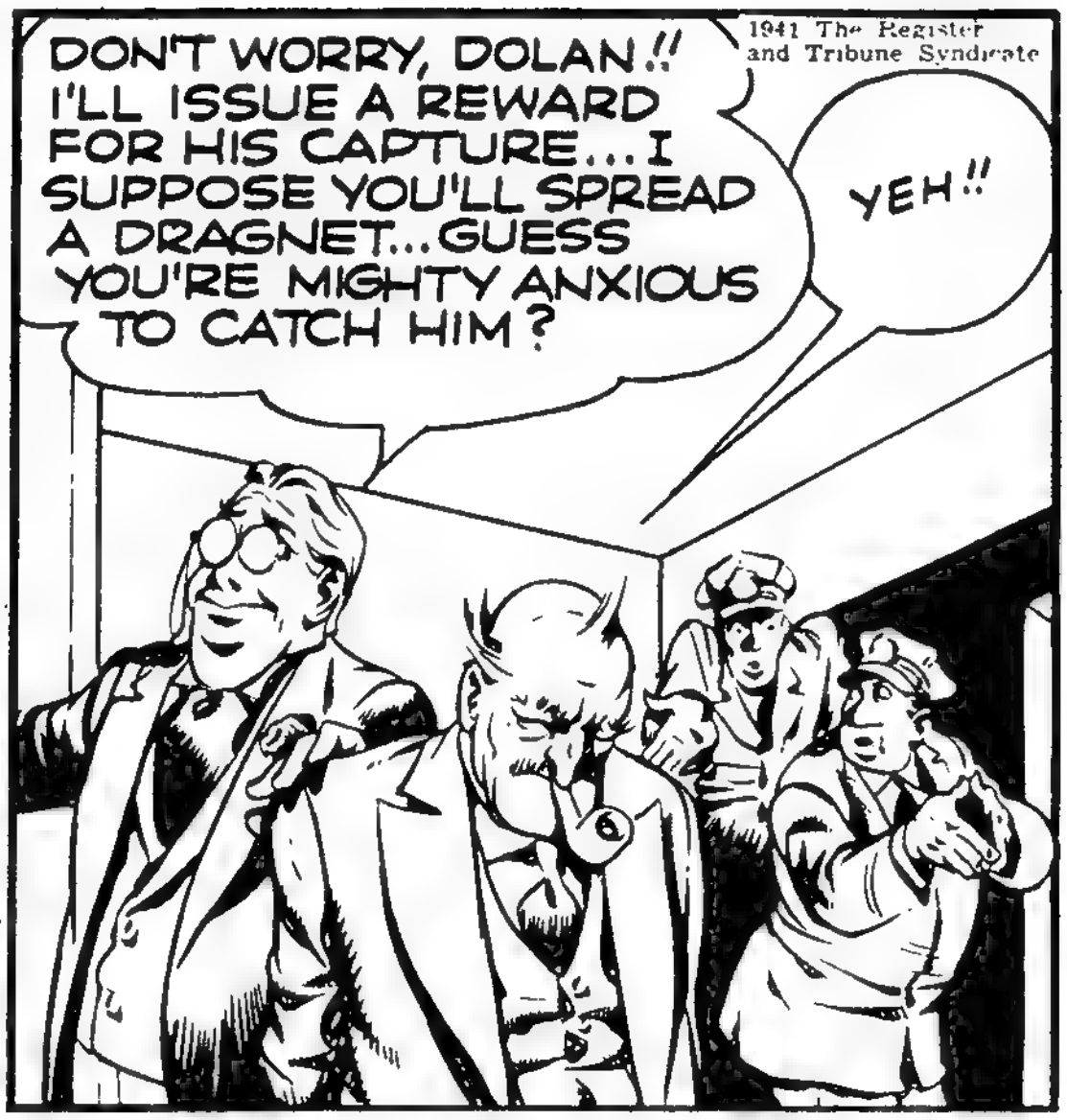
Four volumes collecting the Spirit dailies are still in print. If your local dealer doesn't have them, write to Ken Pierce, P.O. Box 332, Park Forest IL 60466.

By WILL EISNER

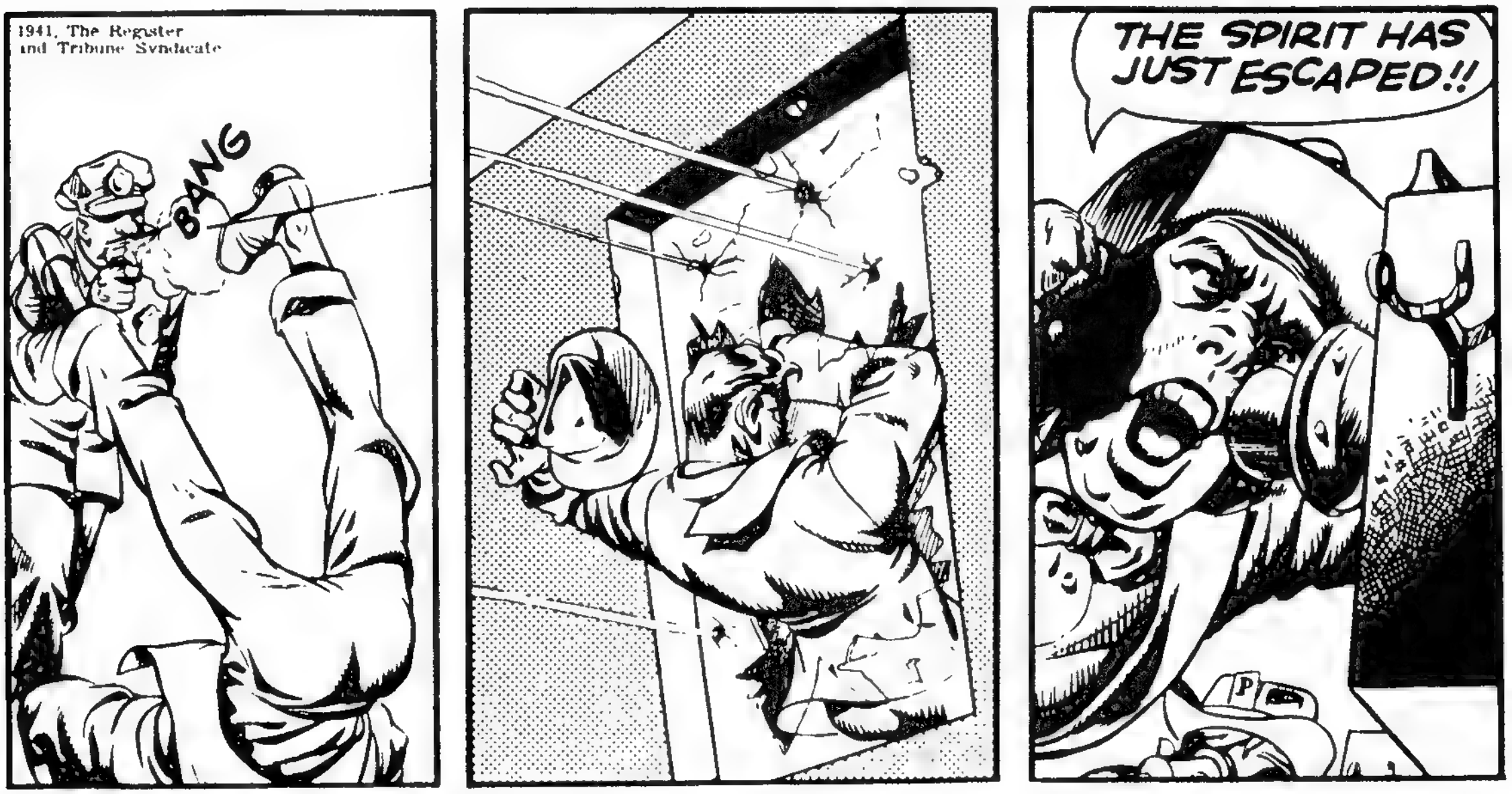

NO MORE PICTURES NOW, BOYS!! COMMISSIONER DOLAN CAPTURED THE SPIRIT HIMSELF... AND I PERSONALLY HEARD HIM CONFESS TO KILLING COWER!

JUST A MINUTE, BOYS ...HERE'S A SCOOP!!

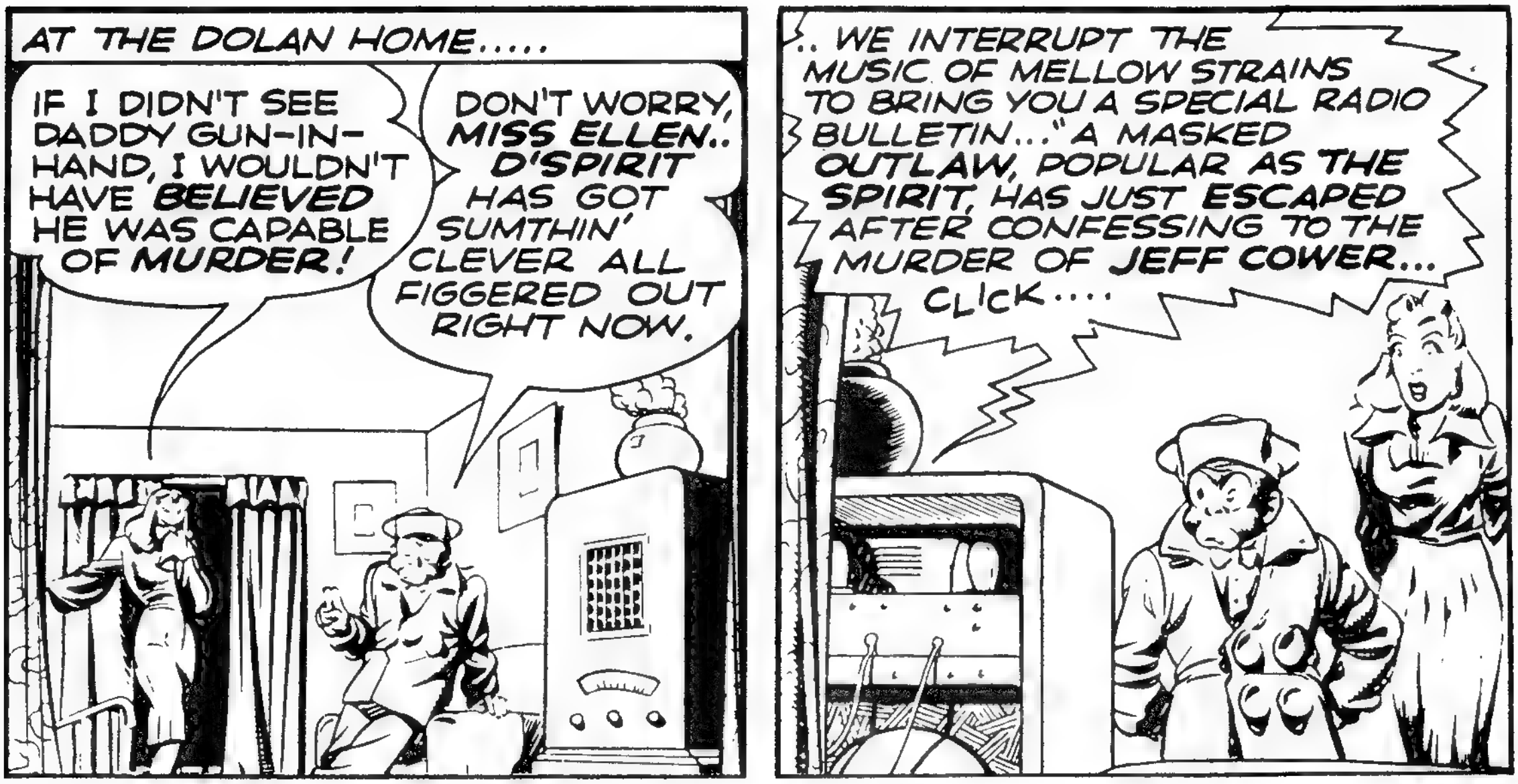
WELL..DO SOMETHING, SOMEBODY!! THE SPIRIT HAS ESCAPED!!
GOLLY! DID'JA SEE THAT? RIGHT OUTA THE WINDOW!
DID I? I GOT A PICTURE OF IT..... WOTTA SCOOP!
10


DON'T WORRY, DOLAN!! I'LL ISSUE A REWARD FOR HIS CAPTURE... I SUPPOSE YOU'LL SPREAD A DRAGNET...GUESS YOU'RE MIGHTY ANXIOUS TO CATCH HIM?
1941 The Register and Tribune Syndicate
YEH!!

By WILL EISNER

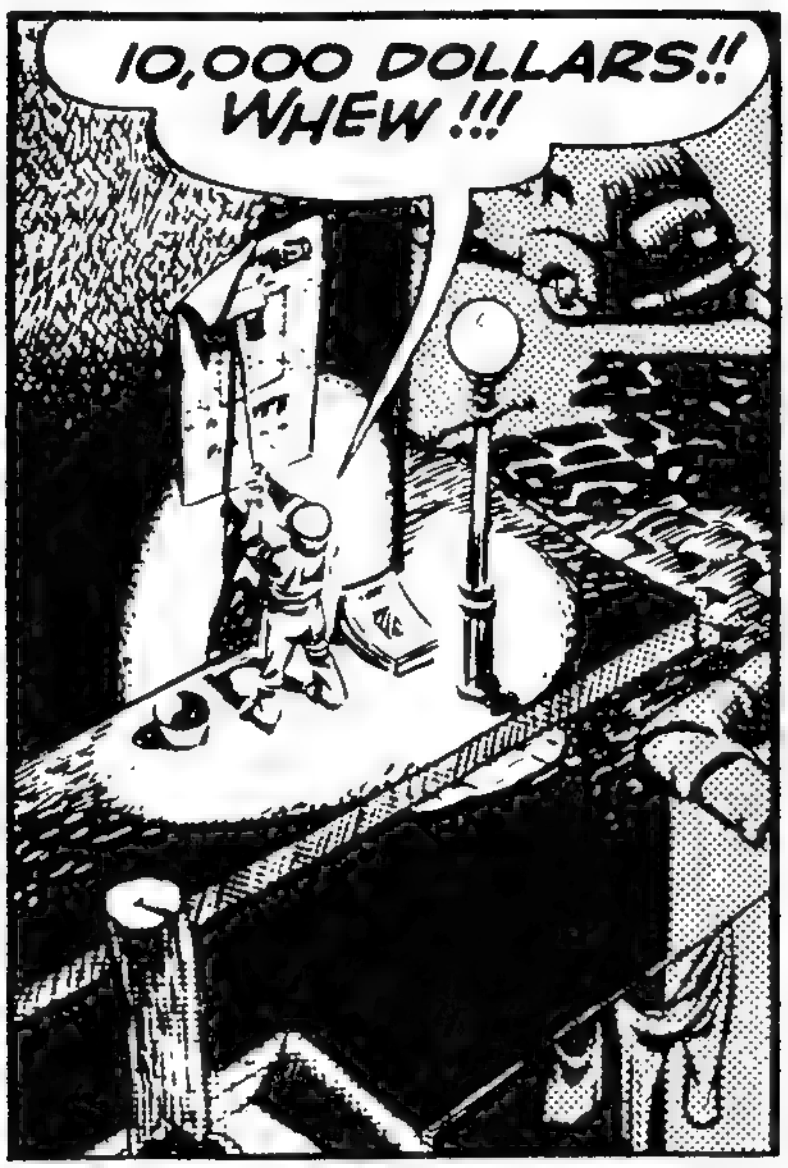


By Will Eisner


AT THE DOLAN HOME.....
IF I DIDN'T SEE DADDY GUN-IN-HAND, I WOULDN'T HAVE BELIEVED HE WAS CAPABLE OF MURDER!
DON'T WORRY, MISS ELLEN.. D'SPIRIT HAS GOT SUMTHIN' CLEVER ALL FIGGERED OUT RIGHT NOW.
.. WE INTERRUPT THE MUSIC OF MELLOW STRAINS TO BRING YOU A SPECIAL RADIO BULLETIN..." A MASKED OUTLAW, POPULAR AS THE SPIRIT, HAS JUST ESCAPED AFTER CONFESSING TO THE MURDER OF JEFF COWER...
CLICK....

WANTED
$10,000 REWARD FOR ANY INFORMATION LEADING TO HIS ARREST
THE SPIRIT
DEAD OR ALIVE

HERE'S YOUR DOUGH... YOU WON'T TALK.. WILL YOU?
WHY SHOULD I? THE SPIRIT'S TAKIN' MY RAP!
WANTED


10,000 DOLLARS!! WHEW!!!

MIGHTY BIG LUMP O'MONEY...!! WISH I COULD GET MY HANDS ON HIM!
12

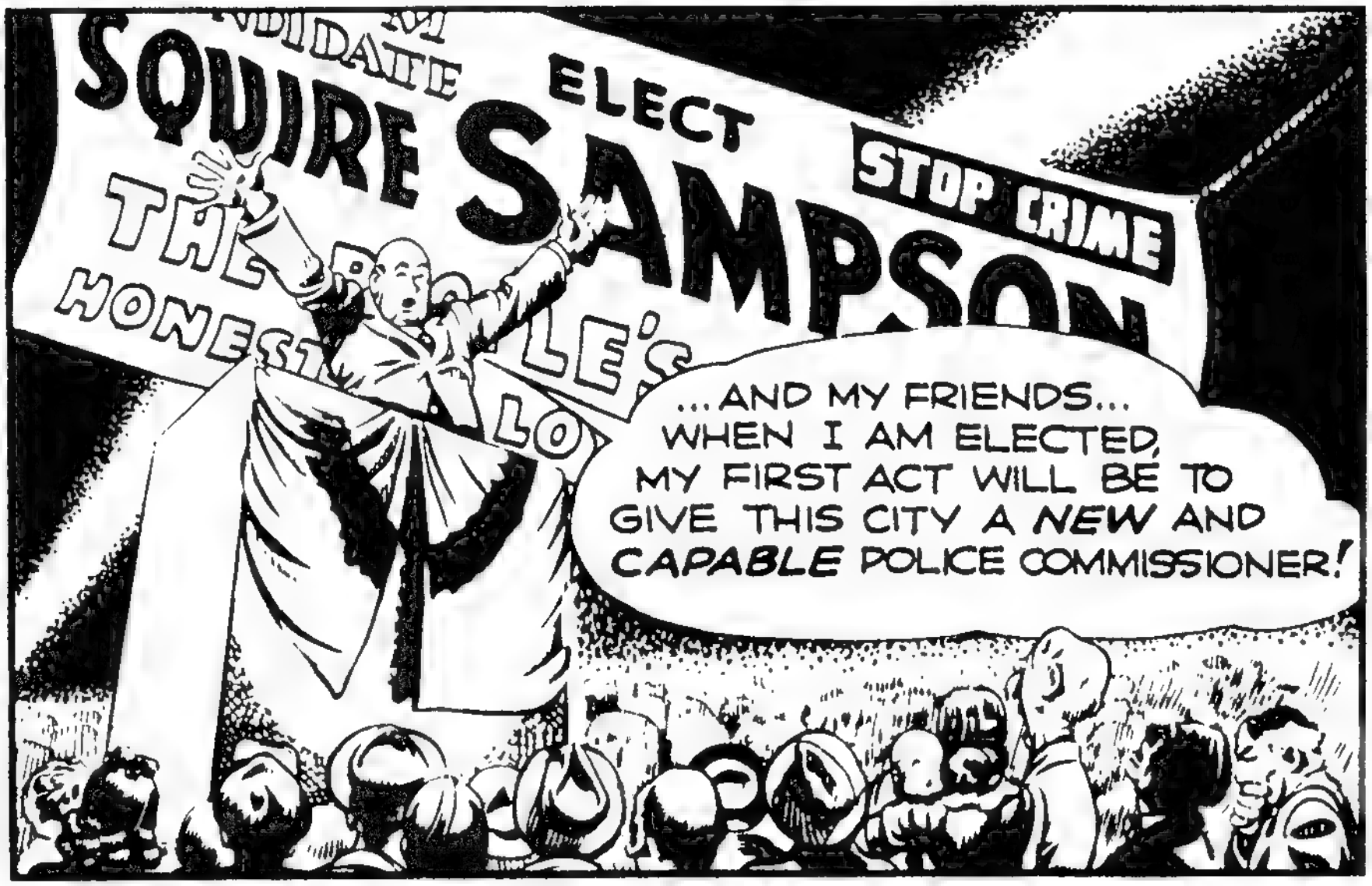
IT'D BE A CINCH! A SHORT UPPERCUT AND I'D DROP HIM IN A HEAP... YEP.. I JUST WISH I DID MEET HIM.....
SPIRIT

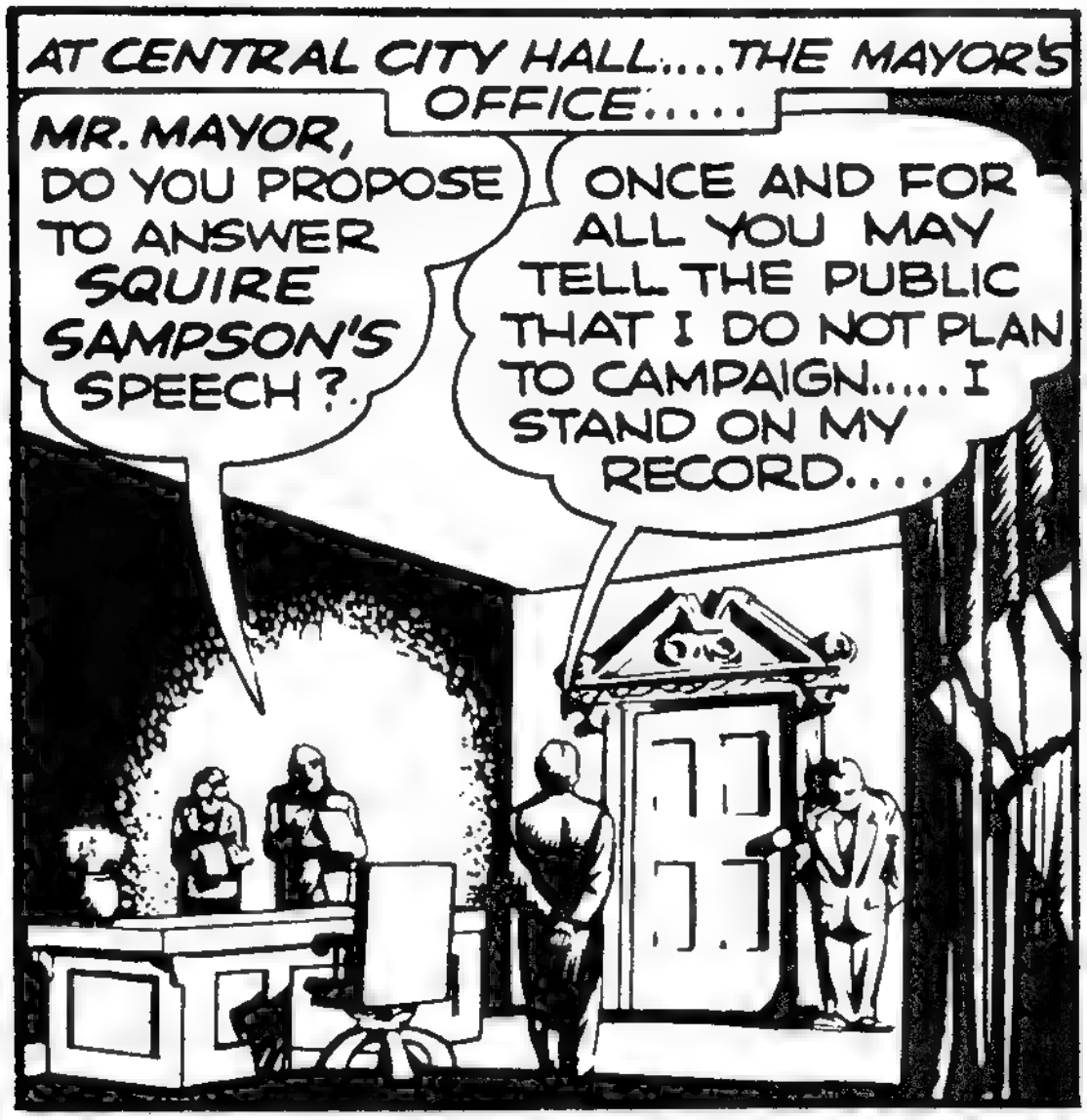
By Will Eisner

1942. The Register and Tribune Syndicate
ONE... TWO..THREE.. FOUR..S'MATTER, ...DON'T YOU TRUST ME ??
BANG
WANTED
THE SPIRIT
OH... I JUST WANTED TO MAKE SURE !

By Will Eisner

TO COVER *COMMISSIONER DOLAN*, THE *SPIRIT* HAS TAKEN THE BLAME FOR MURDER OF *JEFF COWER*... *DOLAN'S* POLITICAL ENEMY.... AND WHILE *THE SPIRIT* WALKS THE STREETS, WE BEGIN TO SEE THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME...

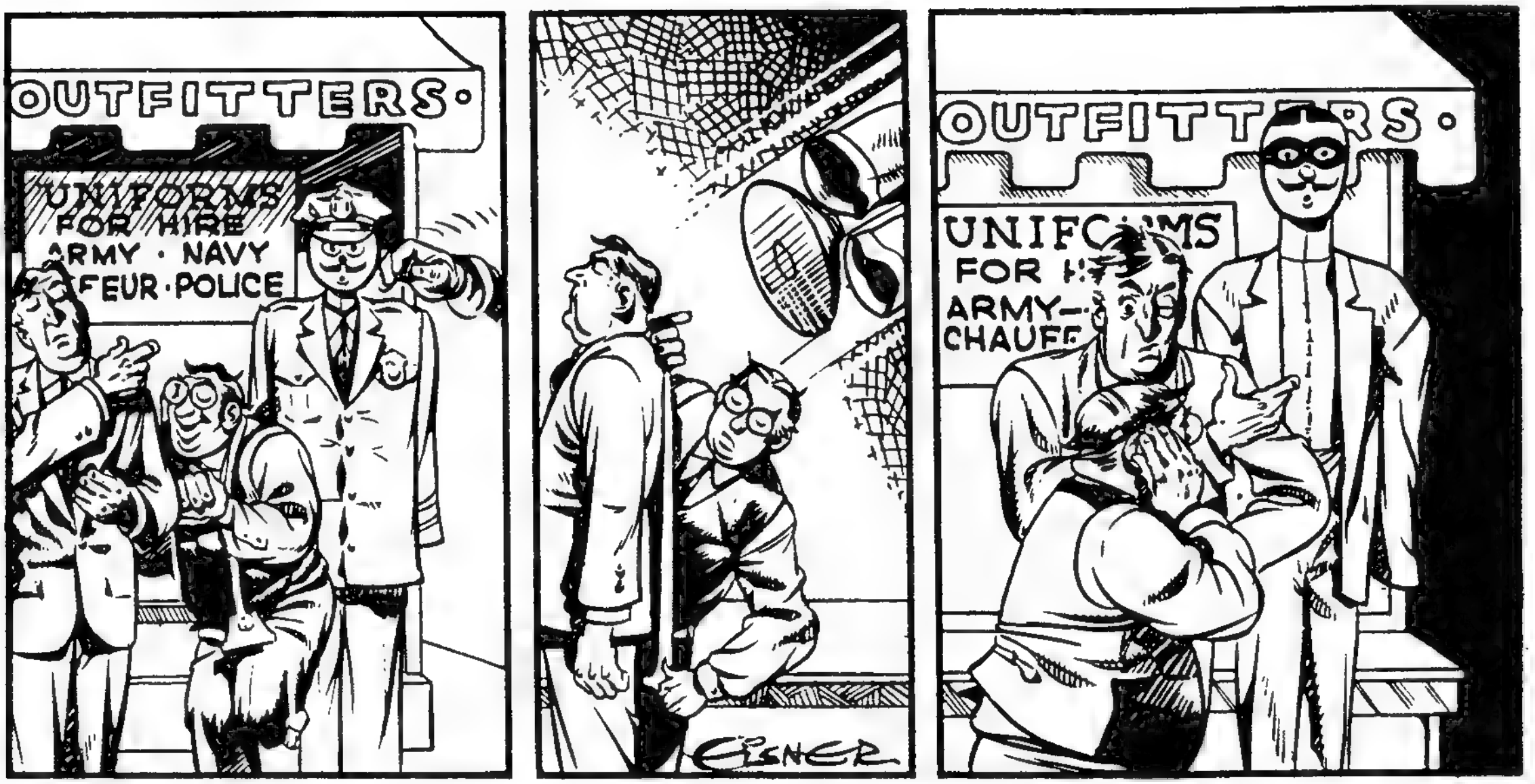

SQUIRE SAMPSON
ELECT
STOP CRIME
THE PEOPLE'S
HONEST
...AND MY FRIENDS... WHEN I AM ELECTED, MY FIRST ACT WILL BE TO GIVE THIS CITY A *NEW* AND *CAPABLE* POLICE COMMISSIONER!


AT CENTRAL CITY HALL....THE MAYOR'S OFFICE.....
MR. MAYOR, DO YOU PROPOSE TO ANSWER *SQUIRE SAMPSON'S* SPEECH?
ONCE AND FOR ALL YOU MAY TELL THE PUBLIC THAT I DO NOT PLAN TO CAMPAIGN..... I STAND ON MY RECORD....

AND *COMMISSIONER DOLAN*.. ANY NEWS ON *THE SPIRIT*?
YEH..WHEN CAN WE EXPECT HIS CAPTURE?
ANY HOUR... MY POLICE ARE COMBING THE CITY..HE HASN'T GOT A CHANCE!

By Will Eisner

By Will Eisner

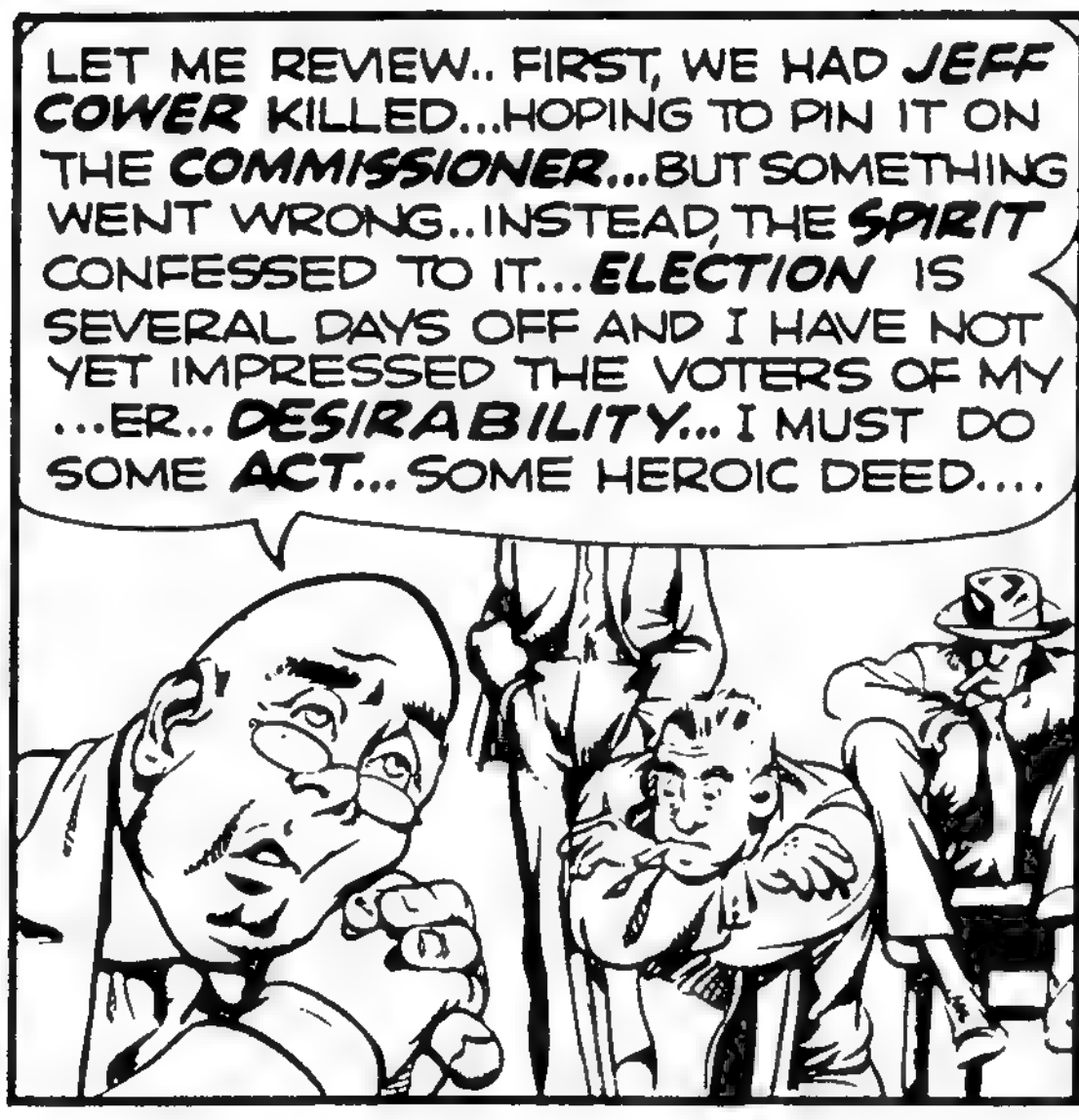


NEW ON THIS BEAT, EH? WELL, TAKE IT FROM O'TOOLE, IT'S NO CINCH.... 'SPECIALLY WITH THIS SPIRIT FELLER BEIN' SOUGHT FER MURDER LIKE HE IS !!
WANTED
RIT

FAITH, BY THE LOOKS OF HIS FACE I'D SAY HE WAS A DAYCENT LAD.... BUT BEWARE !! THEM'S THE KIND THAT KILL !!
WANTED

THE SPIRIT

EVENING, SQUIRE SAMPSON!
H'YA, BOSS!!
GENTLEMEN, THINGS ARE GOING BADLY FOR US...WE MUST PROTECT OUR INTERESTS AT ONCE!


LET ME REVIEW.. FIRST, WE HAD JEFF COWER KILLED...HOPING TO PIN IT ON THE COMMISSIONER...BUT SOMETHING WENT WRONG..INSTEAD, THE SPIRIT CONFESSED TO IT...ELECTION IS SEVERAL DAYS OFF AND I HAVE NOT YET IMPRESSED THE VOTERS OF MY ...ER.. DESIRABILITY... I MUST DO SOME ACT... SOME HEROIC DEED....

By Will Eisner

By Will Eisner

GOLLY SQUIRE... Y'MEAN YER GONNA CAPTURE THE SPIRIT?!!
EXACTLY! AND I'LL TURN HIM OVER TO THE POLICE..WITH..ER.. LOTS OF PUBLICITY OF COURSE..I'LL BE A HERO...AND..AHEM.. I COULD USE THE $10,000 REWARD!

Smashing, Two-Fisted Action

*THE SPIRIT

... AND FURTHERMORE, LADIES...I'M GOING TO PROVE MY ABILITY BY CAPTURING THE SPIRIT MYSELF....THAT IS MORE THAN THE ADMINISTRATION CAN BOAST!!

By Will Eisner

LET HIM HAVE IT, TOMMY..
RIGHT, BOSS!
THAT SHOULD REASSURE THE REST OF YOU..OH DEAR, I'M LATE...I'M DUE TO SPEAK AT THE "LADIES PEACE AND PLENTY SOCIETY"..SEE YOU LATER, BOYS....

That's Realistic---Not Fantastic!

By Will Eisner

BOSS...YOU'RE LETTIN' YERSELF IN FER TROUBLE! THAT SPIRIT GUY IS TOUGH!!
DON'T WORRY, TOMMY...LISTEN... WHEN THE SPIRIT HEARS THAT I'VE PROMISED TO CAPTURE HIM, HE'LL VISIT ME!!

I WILL SURROUND MYSELF WITH BODYGUARDS CONSTANTLY..... AS SOON AS HE SHOWS UP... YOU'LL NAB HIM!!...YES INDEED...THINGS ARE GOING TO BE FINE!!

"I want to repeat that I think it is pretty darned nice of you to make the concessions you did. I only wish the financial situation was different. I await your answer.

"P.S. . . .referring to the 'Manhunter' story. Keep using the three characters; a woman, a dwarf and a giant as long as you can get good plots around them. However, don't take the story away from Manhunter. Those characters are not absolutely vital—they are merely villains."

[April, undated, 1942, Powell to Eisner] "Enclosed find this week's 'Mr. Mystic' and the story of the twins for *The Spirit.*

"I did all that was requested on MM, putting in balloons et al. I hope Tony will find it all right to work with and tell him to keep the lettering small. I still think small lettering looks better. Don't worry about my asking for money when you're away. I won't. As soon as I get 'Loops and Banks' back, I'll be all set. With stories and all tho' these past few months have been pretty lean, tho' I'm sure everything will work out all right.

"Hang on to the story and I'll be up with Florence Monday. It's our wedding anniversary and we're going to celebrate by taking the day off. . .We can discuss final changes of the story then, and talk over the others I sent you. Don't worry about the story being like anything from *Colliers.* It's altogether different.

"Though I'll be up on Monday, I'd appreciate your sending me the check for MM as soon as you can, 'cause I gotta buy Flo a present. . ."

Will's letter of reply, sent to Powell on April 16, 1942, goes into fine detail about the "twins" story—and makes it quite clear that this story never made it to print. References to "the wig figure," and "man with girl's wig. . .a slap-happy love story with old geezers" and "Dolan's 'screwy' cousins who are in a circus" cannot be related to any published *Spirit* story, ever.

Powell took this latest rejection with good grace, under the circumstances. In an undated letter, circa April 18, 1942, he noted that "Flo and I both enjoyed your note no end. For some reason it struck us as being hilariously funny. . ."

"I have another idea for a *Spirit* story which I hope to write over the weekend. It's about spies and shipyards, and will include Ellen in the plot."

The "spies and shipyards" story was eventually made into a *Spirit* tale, but not while Eisner was involved in overseeing the production of work by his ghosts. It seems to have been either the January 17, 1943 episode, "Keep Mum on Ship Movements," an extremely patriotic and Powell-like tale of Nazi submarines, or the August 8, 1943 "Shipboard Sabotage," which, although it doesn't feature Ellen, is also written in a manner reminiscent of Powell's anti-Nazi material.

[April, undated,1942, Blum to Eisner] "I think you've hit upon the best scheme for both of us. I'll be glad to do at least two *Spirit* scripts a month, and more if I get the 'inspiration.' I promise to put my full effort in them, regardless. After all, I only hurt myself doing otherwise. And I will leave the payment to you, trusting that you will be fair about it.

"I will work on the English kid idea as we discussed it, next week. Also a 'Doll Man' for next week.

The "English kid idea" Toni Blum mentioned is undoubtedly the June 14, 1942 "Sybil, Cecil and Callous Joe," a tale in which Ellen Dolan temporarily adopts two British war orphans, Sybil and Cecil Stedwick. In addition, Eisner has told me that he believes Blum scripted two other stories printed that June: "The Baby King" (June 7) and "His Majesty, King Zenix II" (June 21). These were all pencilled by Eisner and inked by Lou Fine.

[April, undated, 1942, Powell to Eisner] "Enclosed find MM No. 23 A and the breakdown for the *Spirit* story with some of the changes you suggested. . .I didn't want to write the copy on the story until I'm sure the plot and breakdown are completely approved. In that way, we can avoid any of the last story's trouble. . .

"Yesterday was the big day and we had much fun in the city in the PM. We went to the Diamond Horseshoe and enjoyed it no end. . .especially those seven foot gorgeous gals they had parading around. Woo Woo. . .and I ain't kiddin'. Brother, are they terrific. Without a doubt, they are the most beautiful show girls I have ever seen, and when they come six feet seven (and I'm not exaggerating), boy, then you have quality and quantity. Acres and acres of it.

"Florence bought me a ping pong table and I'm in my glory. I wish to hell you'd come out, so I could trim the pants off you. And why don't you come out, anyway?

"I bought her a blooded, blonde cocker puppy and it's adorable. Really, you'll fall in love with it when you see it. You just can't help it, it's so friendly and cute. Of course it puddles all over the place, but that will come out all right too.

". . .Say, did I send up some blank sheets the last time? I had four sheets all laid out ready for work, and I couldn't find them. Did I mail them all up in one bundle? Am I going stupid? Yeeeeaaaaaoooowwww. . ."

The blonde cocker spaniel Powell got his wife soon became a regular fixture in "Mr. Mystic"—which made Mystic the only sorcerer in the history of comics to own a dog. Ridiculous it might have been, except that Powell took such pleasure in drawing the pooch, and did it so well, that the final effect was very charming and not at all disconcerting.

The Spirit story Powell enclosed with the above letter was evidently "The Charity Ball," which did not see print until March 5, 1944, long after Powell himself had joined the Air Force and was no longer in the shop. It is a weak plot, which may account for the delay in using it, but Eisner's comments, sent on April 22, 1942, identify the major story elements beyond the shadow of a doubt:

"The following are some changes you asked for in *The Spirit* story:

"Why did the Spirit come to the benefit show? You still don't answer it. You infer that the letter Dolan got is the cause, but it isn't reason enough (the handling I mean, not the reason).

"As far as the plot goes, it would have been far, far better to have the robberies take place in the beginning. I mean putting the meat of page six up to page one. Thus the money is stolen in the first place OR have the Spirit meet Dolan at a benefit show (having been summoned on the pretext of terrible danger). He says, puff, puff, puff, what in heck was the urgent message and Dolan says stuff about 'young' brats.

"Can't we gag up the lead a little more? How about a stag line behind the opening victim. . .you know a bunch of wolves like you were at the Diamond Horeshoe . . ." (In a handwritten synopsis from which this letter was typed, Eisner wrote: "a stag line behind the opening victim—jerks leering.")

His letter to Powell continued: "The general idea in *The Spirit* stories is to give him some sort of problem—somewhere before the end of page four. Either show the problem (apparently unsolvable, of course) before the entrance of the Spirit or after. In this case, you might do it simultaneously. Somebody lifts the dough while the Spirit is bussing Ellen.

"Gawd Almighty, I am sick of seeing this story, so do it up.

"I am glad that you and Florence had a swell time, I have seen the girls at the Diamond Horseshoe. WOW! I am sorry I won't be able to play ping pong with you because I am slated for induction at the end of next week—May 1st. But I will send your blonde cocker puppy a fire hydrant from Manila.

"Yes, you did send some blank sheets last time. I thought you had suddenly become opulent—so I drew six *Spirit* stories on them. Too bad, chum, you are not going to get them back. The answer to your very last sentence is 'yes.' "

Powell continued to worry over "The Charity Ball," yet was unable to convince Eisner of its merits. An undated letter from late April, 1942, sums up his concerns:

"Sorry, old boy, but really I'd feel much better if the story was okayed before I start writing copy. This time I'm sure it'll be all right. I cut out one character, simplified it much and made it twice as good. It holds together much better and works out fine. So if you'll please put your ok on it, why we'll really do it up brown. Don't blame you for being sick of it. I am too."

continued on page 64...

COMIC BOOK SECTION

The Detroit News
THE HOME NEWSPAPER

3 COMPLETE STORIES

SUNDAY, AUGUST 11, 1940

THE SPIRIT

BY WILL EISNER

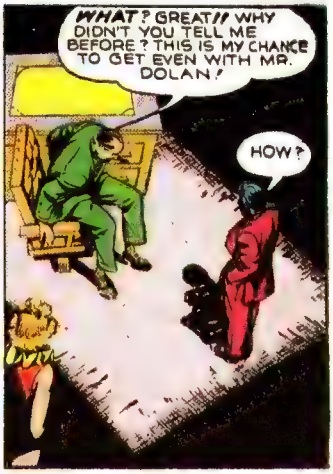
SPIRIT, I AM GOING TO KILL YOU!
WHY, HOMER CREEP! I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SINCE YOU AND ELLEN BECAME ENGAGED!
DENNY COLT IS NOT DEAD. INSTEAD AS THE SPIRIT, HE FIGHTS A SINGLE HANDED WAR AGAINST CRIME AND EVIL
FROM HIS HIDEAWAY IN THE ABANDONED WILDWOOD CEMETERY, THE SPIRIT GOES ABROAD..TO RIGHT WRONGS AND AID THE DOWNTRODDEN...

YEAH, AND EVER SINCE ELLEN MET YOU, MY LIFE'S BEEN MISERY. SHE'S EVEN REFUSED TO MARRY ME!
CAREFUL WITH THAT GUN, HOMER, IT MIGHT GO OFF!

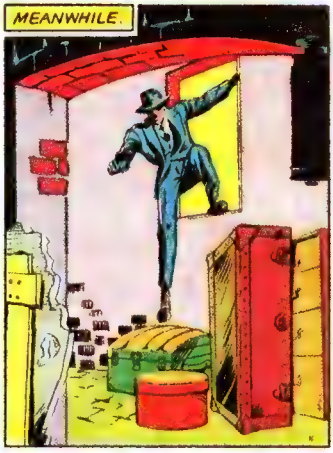
COME INTO MY STUDY
GOSH! YOU'VE GOT A REGULAR HOUSE BUILT UNDERGROUND. LABORATORY AND ALL!
YES, FROM HERE I CAN FIGHT CRIME IN COMPLETE SECRECY.. NOW TELL ME, WHY AM I TO BLAME?
REMEMBER THE NIGHT WE ANNOUNCED OUR ENGAGEMENT? YOU WERE THERE AND YOU REMOVED ELLEN'S UGLY GLASSES AND FIXED HER HAIR SO SHE'D LOOK PRETTY. WELL, NOW THAT SHE IS BEAUTIFUL, IT'S GONE TO HER HEAD!
SHE WANTS TO GO ON THE STAGE.. BECOME A CHORUS GIRL!
WELL, WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT?
NOTHING, EXCEPT NOW SHE WANTS A MORE ROMANTIC MAN..LIKE..WELL.. LIKE YOU! IT'S EITHER YOU OR ME!
DON'T WORRY, HOMER. HERE'S A PLAN THAT NEVER FAILS. I'LL KIDNAP HER YOU WILL COME IN AND SAVE HER FROM ME! YOU'LL BE A HERO AND SHE'LL HATE ME!
GOSH, SPIRIT, YOU'RE NOT SUCH A BAD GUY AT THAT!
MEANWHILE, AT COMMISSIONER DOLAN'S HOME, THAT NIGHT..
BUT YOU CAN'T DO THIS, ELLEN, YOU'RE THE DAUGHTER OF A POLICE COMMISSIONER! A PUBLIC OFFICIAL!
DON'T BE OLD FASHIONED, DADDY.. BESIDES, I'M USING THE NAME OF DAISY KAY. NO ONE'LL KNOW!
AT THE THEATRE, ONE HOUR LATER.
CURTAIN GOING UP, MISS KAY, HURRY!
?
O.K., TOMMY.
?

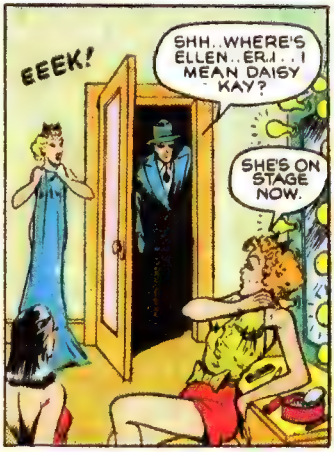
HEY, BOSS!
DON'T BOTHER ME, MOPEY! AS I WAS SAYIN', THIS IS AN EASIER RACKET THAN BOOTLEGGIN'.. SO TINKER GORDON IS GOING TO BE A PRODUCER!

HEY, STOP BOTHERIN' ME! WHAT DO YOU WANT?
LISSEN, TINKER, COMMISSIONER DOLAN'S DAUGHTER IS IN THIS SHOW!

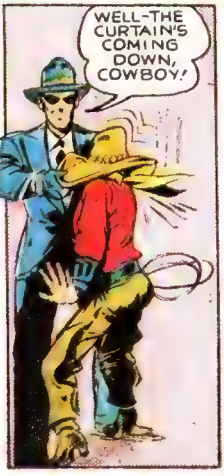

WHAT? GREAT!! WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME BEFORE? THIS IS MY CHANCE TO GET EVEN WITH MR. DOLAN!
HOW?

YOU SAP! IF THE PUBLIC FOUND OUT THAT HIS KID IS IN A SHOW RUN BY TINKER GORDON, BOOTLEGGER, THE MAYOR WOULD KICK HIM OUTTA OFFICE! DON'T LET HER OUT OF YOUR SIGHT.. BOY OH BOY!

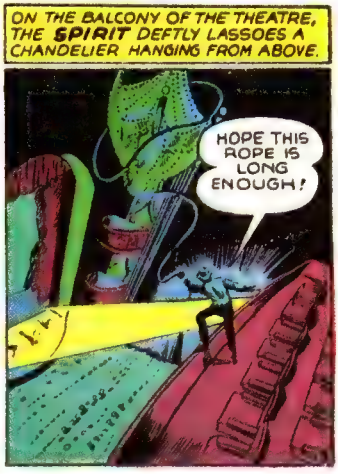

MEANWHILE.

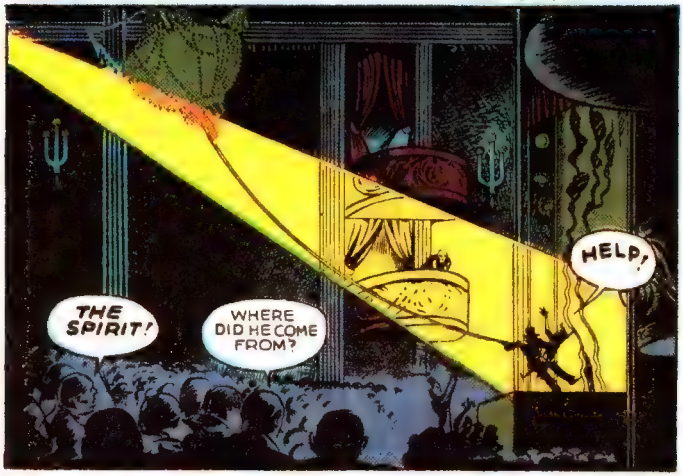

EEEK!
SHH..WHERE'S ELLEN..ER..I MEAN DAISY KAY?
SHE'S ON STAGE NOW.

HEY! YOU CAN'T GO OUT THERE! THE CURTAIN IS UP!
REALLY?


WELL-THE CURTAIN'S COMING DOWN, COWBOY!

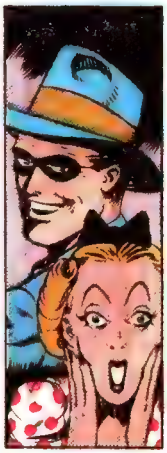
AH! THIS ROPE HAS GIVEN ME AN IDEA!


ON THE BALCONY OF THE THEATRE, THE SPIRIT DEFTLY LASSOES A CHANDELIER HANGING FROM ABOVE.
HOPE THIS ROPE IS LONG ENOUGH!


THE SPIRIT!
WHERE DID HE COME FROM?
HELP!

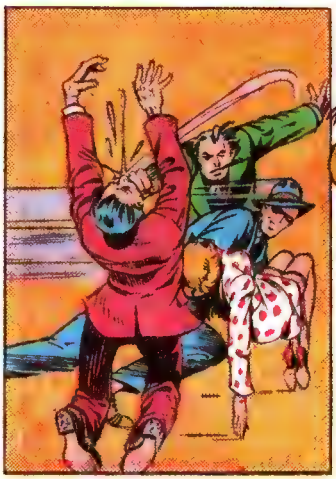
STOP STRUGGLING, ELLEN!
PUT ME DOWN, YOU BEAST!

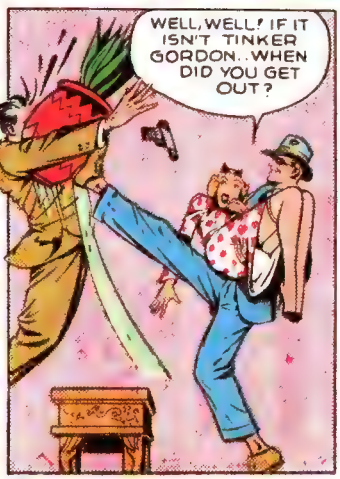
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH ME?
I'M TAKING YOU TO A LITTLE SHACK ON SPRING ROAD, THERE I'LL FEED YOU TO MY PET FISHES-AND THEY LOOK JUST LIKE THIS... GRRR-R!



HEY, BOSS, THE SPIRIT HAS JUST SNATCHED THE DOLAN GIRL!
WHAT?! C'MON, YOU LUNKHEAD! WE'VE GOT TO STOP HIM!

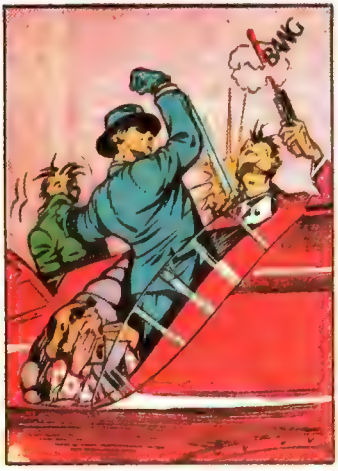
HERE HE COMES!
LET HIM HAVE IT!




WELL, WELL! IF IT ISN'T TINKER GORDON.. WHEN DID YOU GET OUT?

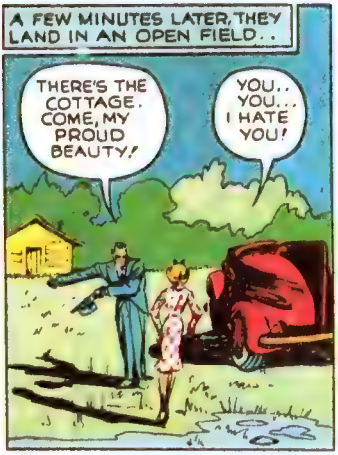
ROUND UP THE MOB! BRING YER GUNS! ... STOP HIM!!

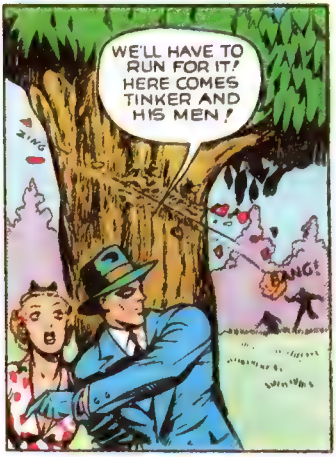
WITH A HEAVY ROAR, THE SPIRIT'S AUTO-PLANE SPROUTS ITS WINGS AND ZOOMS SKYWARD, WITH TWO GANGSTERS STILL CLINGING TO IT..
STOWAWAYS!


BANG

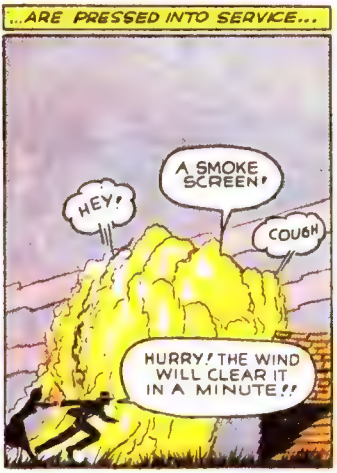
ZOOMING LOW THE SPIRIT DROPS THE GANGSTERS ON THE ROOF OF THE PURSUING CAR.....

FOLLOW THE PLANE TO WHERE IT GOES!
BANG


A FEW MINUTES LATER, THEY LAND IN AN OPEN FIELD..
THERE'S THE COTTAGE. COME, MY PROUD BEAUTY!
YOU.. YOU... I HATE YOU!


WE'LL HAVE TO RUN FOR IT! HERE COMES TINKER AND HIS MEN!
ZING
BANG!

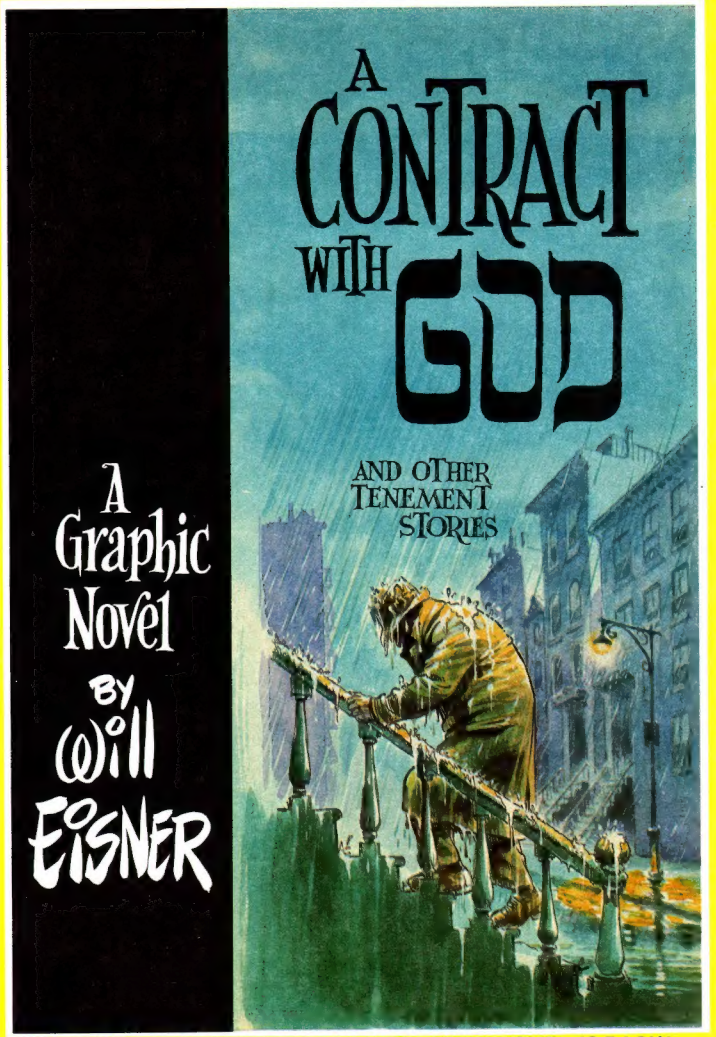
THE SPIRIT'S HANDY SMOKE BOMBS..
BANG


...ARE PRESSED INTO SERVICE...
HEY!
A SMOKE SCREEN!
COUGH
HURRY! THE WIND WILL CLEAR IT IN A MINUTE!!

SLAM
AH! SAFE AT LAST!

THE SMOKE CLEARED, THE GANG PREPARES TO ATTACK THE HUT.
WE'VE GOT TO GET THAT GIRL OUT OF THE SPIRIT'S HANDS OR OUR PLAN IS SPOILED!
THIS'LL SCARE HIM OUT!
KEEP FLAT ON THE FLOOR, ELLEN, ONE OF THEM IS CREEPING UP ON US!
TINKER GORDON DECIDES ON NEW TACTICS TO DRIVE THEM OUT.
KEEP CIRCLING AROUND IN INDIAN FASHION AND KEEP SHOOTING! WE'LL SMOKE 'EM OUT!
BANG
CAN'T HOLD OUT MUCH LONGER.. I'VE GOT TO GET OUT AND STOP THEM!
AS THE CAR SHOOTS BY, THE SPIRIT LEAPS..
?
AH! PEEK-A-BOO!
6

AND A MOST UNUSUAL SPIRIT STORY COMES TO YOU NEXT WEEK... DON'T MISS IT!



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continued from page 56

The rest of the letter—the last one in Eisner's file, and thus the last letter he received before going off to face the uncertainties of the war—was a tenderly delicate attempt on Powell's part to soothe the emotional conflicts which had arisen between the two men over the preceding months. When Eisner was running the Tudor City shop, Powell was his second in command, the only other person with a key to the studio, and the man who was counted on to run things in Eisner's absence. However, once Eisner moved to Stamford, Powell was left on his own, with no authority over others. In addition, he found that, despite his other successes at scripting and drawing comics, he could not please Eisner enough to sell him even one *Spirit* story. This rankled him quite a bit.

Powell's real name was Stanley Pulowski. He was of Polish descent, and it was he who had suggested that Blackhawk be Polish. His first name, Stan, was given to another member of the "Blackhawk" team.

He was a very patriotic man, as evidenced by the reprimands his stories received from editors who thought his anti-Nazi sentiments were too rabid and cruel. One of Powell's biggest difficulties in relating to Eisner, despite their many years of association, lay in the fact that Powell was extremely anti-Semitic. His prejudice against Jews was not limited to fellow workers, such as Eisner, and he tended to blame Jews and their supposed tightness with money for some of his own financial problems.

In the comics industry, which at the time was dominated by Jewish publishers, editors, art directors, writers and artists, Powell's anti-Semitism certainly found many targets. Just about anybody who offended him was either Jewish or was working for a Jew. (For another account of Bob Powell's feelings, and his later opinions of Eisner, see the interview with his one-time assistant, Howard Nostrand, which ran in *Graphic Story Magazine* and was recently reprinted in *The Comics Journal No. 95).*

His attempts to reconcile anti-Semitism with anti-Nazi sentiments were difficult to resolve, no doubt, but Powell always placed patriotism above his bigotry, and this is what led to his poignant farewell to Eisner. He perceived Eisner as a man about to engage in a noble mission which might lead to his death in a good cause. For Powell, this cause stood high above any personal animosity he might have had for Will or any general prejudice he felt. His closing words to Will:

"So the die is cast? You go the first, eh? I felt almost sure that you wouldn't be called until later. The radio commentator just said that all men in class three would be reclassified into subdivisions A and B depending on the importance of their jobs. Move over, chum.

"I don't want to get sickly sentimental, but as I probably won't get to see you before you go, I'd like you to know that all my best wishes go with you. I don't know what you think, but believe this: I never had anything against you personally. Whatever differences we might have had were because of business reasons, on my part, anyway. I might have said some nasty things when we were having our little trouble—which Tex probably told you—but they were said because I was boiling mad. Mostly, I find now, I'm much better suited to work by myself. You're a pretty good guy, and it's too bad that we'll never be able to be real friends again.

"Don't worry about 'Mr. Mystic' when you're away. I'll try my best as always. If I can help out Busy in any way, I will gladly, though, of course, my being here and his being there doesn't lend itself too well. However, I'll help him with as many stories as I can. I'll try writing *Spirits*, though it seems now they're too much for me.

"So again, guy, the best of luck, show 'em how to do it, and give 'em hell. If I possibly can get up to Stamford I will, though I doubt it much. Don't forget that hydrant for Mr. Mystic from Manila, and God bless you."

And with that, Will Eisner left the world of comic books for three and a half years. . .

How long Toni Blum continued to write *Spirit* scripts is not clear. However, Bill Woolfolk (who is better known for his work on *Superman*) began to contribute scripts for the dailies as soon as Jack Cole's short stint as a ghost writer/artist came to a close. He also wrote weekly episodes, which began to appear around August, 1942, after the supply of Eisner and Blum stories was depleted.

Woolfolk was soon joined by Manly Wade Wellman, and for the duration of the war, Wellman and Woolfolk's stories loosely alternated in the weekly, while Woolfolk handled the daily alone until it ended in 1944.

Toni Blum married Iger shop artist Bill Bossert and apparently retired from comics in 1942 or '43, after a prolific five-year career during which she wrote adventures for almost all of the Quality and Fiction House characters whose features were produced in Jerry Iger's shop.

Reading these records of studio correspondence from the Golden Age of comics, one gets the impression that little has changed over the years. Artists are still chronically late, writers are still trying to sell more scripts for more money, publishers are still complaining about the state of the market, and editors are still on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

Thus has it been, thus shall it ever be, as long as comic books exist. Amen.

JACK DAVIS

Because of the length of the article about Eisner's pre-war studio, and because of the reprinting of the first 19 *Spirit* daily strips, the Jack Davis shop talk with Eisner and Harvey Kurtzman will be printed in *Will Eisner's Quarterly 6*, due in June. We will also be printing a new Eisner self-contained story, "Sunset in Sunshine City."

Light shed on uncredited artists/writers

It seems that by late October, 1941, Toni Blum was writing entire issues of Quality's *Hit* and *National Comics*, because Busy Arnold wrote to Eisner on October 22 to complain about the sameness of the plots "in the last couple of issues of both *Hit* and *National*, [which] are all in the same 'groove' and all feature [stories] about war, dictators, nazi plots, etc." His advice was to "change the variety of the plots and don't have Miss Blum write all the stories for both magazines. . . [beginning with] the March issues" of both comics.

A rewritten version of the above letter, addressed to Jerry Iger's studio, repeated some of Arnold's objections to the work which was sub-contracted to the Iger shop. This letter did not ask for Toni Blum's removal from any series in the two comics, however. In fact, Arnold did not address any criticism to her at all, other than to note that stories about dictators were becoming too common. "Every comic book in the country is playing up this angle and it is going to lose its appeal very shortly," was all he wrote. Unless evidence to the contrary is found, it appears that Toni Blum continued as the sole writer for *Hit* and *National* well into the 1942-dated issues.

Another letter dealing with credits for then-uncredited writers and artists raises as many questions as it answers. On October 19, 1941, Busy wrote a letter to Will concerning the strip he hated, "Miss America."

"This is a very punk story," he complained, "and the text is disjointed and hard to follow. Evidently Kashuba wrote this story and not Dick French."

The only Kashuba listed in Jerry Bails' *Who's Who of American Comic Books* is Maurice Kashuba, an artist who worked for Centaur, Western and National during the '30s and early '40s. Kashuba is not credited by Bails as having ever worked at Quality, nor is he credited as ever having written a script, but Arnold's letter strongly suggests that not only did Kashuba write "Miss America", he may have been chosen as the replacement artist instead of Jim Mooney, whom Arnold had earlier requested for that feature. Arnold then went on to praise the new art ("certainly an improvement over the previous installment of 'Miss America' ") while further denigrating the script ("the text in this installment was putrid").

The letter concluded with references to Jerry Robinson being late on a five-page "Sniper" installment and asked Will to see that Robinson got caught up, "or if Kashuba is taking over 'The Sniper,' have Robinson get ahead on the new feature [to replace "Miss America"] for *Military Comics.*" One thing seems certain at least: Maurice Kashuba did work for Quality Comics Group in late 1941, a fact previously unchronicled.

More credits come to light in a letter from Arnold to Eisner dated November 28. The opening paragraph concerns payment for Myron Strauss. In the *Who's Who*, Strauss is not credited with working at Quality until the "late '40s," but in this letter, Arnold mentions "a check for $104 for the nine pages of 'Uncle Sam' done by Myron Strauss for the March [1942] issue of *National Comics*, and check for $102 for the six pages of 'Manhunter' without lettering for the March [1942] issue of *Police Comics.*"

Arnold continues: "It certainly took Strauss an awful long time to do the 14-page feature for *Uncle Sam Quarterly* No. 2. . ." While it is clear that Strauss did the two "Uncle Sam" features mentioned above, he may not have been the artist on "Manhunter," because in the same letter Arnold referred to the "man who handles 'Manhunter' " as if he didn't know his name.

The going rate in those days—$15 to $18 per page for scripts, pencils and inks—may seem laughable, but it is not far from what comics artists earn today, taking the intervening years of inflation into account.

ERRATUM

In the first part of this article in *Will Eisner's Quarterly 4*, it was stated that since no record could be found for an "Alexander Koda," it was possible that Busy Arnold made a mistake in names, and that he probably meant Alexander Kotzky. Arnold sometimes made mistakes like that.

It turns out that we made the mistake. According to historian Jim Vadeboncoeur, Koda did indeed draw "Archie Adkins" in *Military Comics.* Apparently a member of Jerry Iger's studio, his other credits include "Fargo Kid" in *Feature Comics* and "Marksman" in *Smash Comics.*

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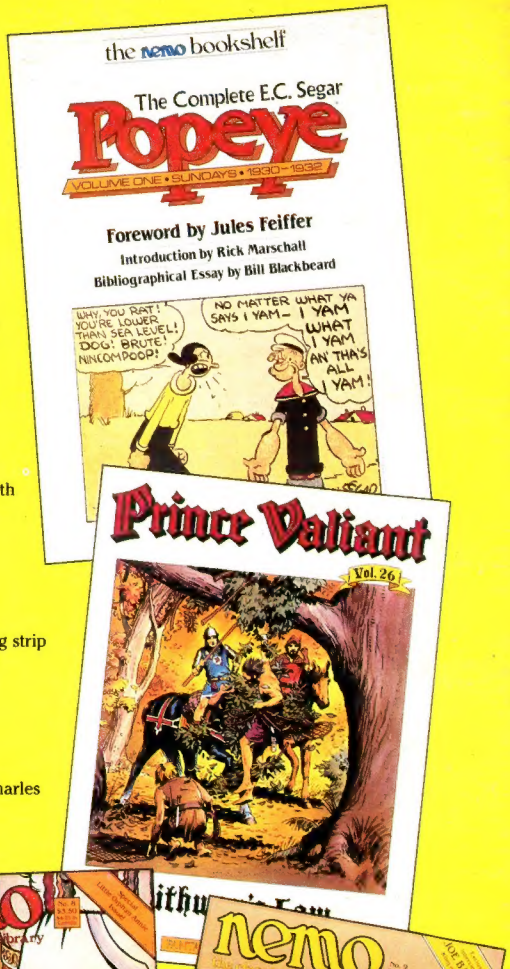
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Bibliographical Essay by Bill Blackbeard
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NO MATTER WHAT YA SAYS I YAM- I YAM WHAT I YAM AN' THA'S ALL I YAM!
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Vol. 26

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